

THE
AMBITION
OF
MARK
TRUITT

HENRY
RUSSELL
MILLER

Grace Oliver

40

THE AMBITION OF MARK TRUITT

THE AMBITION OF MARK TRUITT

By

HENRY RUSSELL MILLER

AUTHOR OF

The Man Higher Up, His Rise to Power, Etc.

INDIANAPOLIS
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

COPYRIGHT 1913
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

PRESS OF
BRAUNWORTH & CO.
BOOKBINDERS AND PRINTERS
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	DREAMS	1
II	THE PATH OF YOUTH	21
III	THE MASTERS	36
IV	THE SERVICE OF THE STRONG	52
V	CROSSROADS	71
VI	MELTING ORE	84
VII	SOLDIER AND MAID	104
VIII	AFIRE	115
IX	LIQUID IRON	125
X	WOUNDED ON THE FIELD	141
XI	THE MEASURE OF A MAN	154
XII	A MAN AND HIS WIFE	172
XIII	TROPHIES	190
XIV	IN THE MOLD	206
XV	STUFF OF DREAMS	220
XVI	GLOWING EMBERS	238
XVII	FANNED INTO FLAME	252
XVIII	SUNDERED BONDS	268
XIX	BOND THOUGH FREE	277
XX	THE RED GLOW	291
XXI	ARCADY	301
XXII	THE CLEFT STICK	314
XXIII	PHILANTHROPY	332
XXIV	THE PRESSURE OF TRUTH	347
XXV	PAYMENT	365
XXVI	THE PENITENT	381
XXVII	CITIES UNBUILT	398
XXVIII	WHITE WATER	411
XXIX	THE MIRACLE	423
XXX	THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE	443

THE AMBITION OF MARK TRUITT

THE AMBITION OF MARK TRUITT

CHAPTER I

DREAMS

HE drifted into the delectable land that lies between sleep and waking, tasting the fleeting savor of his dreams—the epic visions of full-blooded youth. They had passed just beyond memory, leaving a confused yet glowing sense of sharp combats waged, of victories won. A golden haze enveloped him. Through it filtered a dwindling resonance, as of some noble processional sung by a departing far-distant choir.

A wave of delight rippled over him. Then the thought that, not sharing his slumber, had painted his colorful dreams, worked to the surface.

“My last day here!”

He awoke slowly. Before him, seen through the unshuttered window, lay a world somber enough to one tugging against its restraints, lovely when it was to be left behind. He saw the September sun peep over the hills at the head of the valley, rise majestically and swing clear, a golden disk hung in the sky, symbol of the reward of men’s struggles; its radiance, streaming into the little room, dispelled shabbiness with a mellow glow he could almost feel.

2 THE AMBITION OF MARK TRUITT

Purplish shadows rested on the eastern slopes—the hue that is the badge of conquest. The breeze brought its offering, a rich earthy fragrance that he inhaled eagerly. The matin sounds arose, according finely with the lingering echoes of his dream music. He reveled in a new perception.

He was twenty years old.

He was not one to loll. He sprang from bed and stood naked: supple beautiful youth, too slender for great strength but with the unconscious grace of the wild animal. Something animal-like, too, was the pleased look that played over his face, as he breathed in the fragrance of the morning. It was an odd face, swarthy from the summer sun, neither weak nor strong but unset: the countenance of youth untried. Yet it was not without its promise. He would do or be nothing negative, this youth; the dark restless eyes, deep-set and wide apart, proclaimed intensity, primitive passion.

He dressed and stood by the window in the attitude of a listener. Intently he sought to define the faint other-world resonance that still seemed to vibrate about him. But the theme eluded him.

His illusion was effectually shattered. Into the subdued melody of the Sabbath morning thrust a profane intruder, the jerky wheezing notes of a cabinet organ in the day's hymns, played by some one who aspired beyond endowment.

He frowned, then threw back his head and laughed silently—a trick he had sometimes—at the absurd anticlimax.

"I'm still in Bethel. It's a long way from here to—there." He drew a long deep breath.

A question halted him. "There—where?"

He shook his head vigorously, as though to throw off the query, and went down to the kitchen.

The odor of frying ham saluted his nostrils; he sniffed it hungrily. A man, apparently old, was placing heavy, chipped ironware dishes on the table. He nodded briefly in response to the youth's blithe greeting.

"I'll be ready," he said in a dull flat voice, "time ye're back from the stable," and continued his slow precise setting of the table.

In a few minutes the other returned, the horses fed and his own hands and face scrubbed in cold water from the cistern. They sat down without speaking. The youth ate eagerly, gulpingly.

When the first keenness of appetite was gone, burning to talk of the great hour at hand, he broke the silence. "Well, father, this is my last day in Bethel."

The old man merely nodded, keeping his eyes on his plate.

Boyishly the son began to set forth his plans and hopes and expectations; they were not small. But the old man maintained his silence. The youth conceived him to be an unsympathetic audience.

"Guess you're not interested," he said a trifle sulkily.

"Yes, I'm intrusted, Mark," the father answered, "but there ain't anything to say." He raised his

4 THE AMBITION OF MARK TRUITT

glance to the window. "Guess I couldn't say anything that'd help much."

The sweep of youth's anticipation faltered before a quality in the old man's words. Old, "old Simon": so his neighbors called him. Yet he was not really old, but in the noonday of life wore the gray mantle of age. For he, too, had dreamed his big golden dreams. Below the village stood a dismantled rotting forge, monument to their futility. Most men have in them only one big battle; of them was Simon Truitt. After his failure he had returned to his shop and trade, shoeing his neighbors' horses, mending their wagons and plows, a dull-eyed, taciturn, spiritless plodder. A hint of the tragedy of failure, bread of the majority, came to the young man. A cloud had passed across the sun. They finished the meal in heavy silence.

At length Simon Truitt rose and began to clear the table. The son moved toward the door. There he paused, vaguely sensible of a sorrow to which some soothing word was to be said. But the word would not come to lips unschooled in such tender office. He went slowly out into the sunshine.

In the stable he curried the horses, lingering over the pretty brown mare—latest and finest trophy of his horse-trading—until her coat shone satiny. This labor of love ended, he lighted a pipe and sat in the stable doorway. The warm sun beat upon him; the shadow cast by a glimpsed shipwreck lifted.

He sat there until from across the town came a flat unmusical clamor, the cracked church bell call-

ing the faithful—that is to say, all Bethel save one—to worship. He rose reluctantly. Soon he emerged from the little house, shaved to the blood and clad in the discomfort of Sunday clothes. The lithe animal-like grace had departed.

Always on warm Sabbath mornings Simon Truitt was to be found sitting on the stoop, and always facing the north; the dismantled forge lay to the south. He was that one for whom the cracked bell tolled in vain; he was supposed to be an atheist.

"Goin' to church?" he asked in the expressionless tone that was his habit.

"I guess so," answered Mark. "Unless," with sudden understanding, "you'd like me to stay."

Simon hesitated, then shook his head. "No, ye'd better go same as always. Courtney'd want ye to."

"I owe him a lot."

Simon nodded. "More'n to—any one else here. Think a good deal o' him, don't ye?"

"Yes. Sometimes he's kind o' queer, though."

Simon nodded again. "D'y'e," he asked unexpectedly, "d'y'e believe what he preaches?"

"Why, yes!" said Mark. "Yes, I s'pose so," he amended.

The dull glance momentarily sharpened. "Not very much, I expect. Better believe it hard—or not at all. It's most time fur church."

Mark swung heavily down the path. The father's eyes followed him wistfully. One might even have said that the pity which a few hours before had dwelt in the son's glance now crept into the father's.

6 THE AMBITION OF MARK TRUITT

Mark joined the straggling procession that moved, stiffly decorous, toward the house of worship. Once, during the short journey, a spring wagon overtook and passed him; a girl in the rear seat turned and nodded. A wave of red surged into his dark face. Until the wagon drove into the church-yard, his glance clung to the mass of yellow hair under the pink hat. Unconsciously his step quickened.

He found an empty pew near the door, and entering, leaned back, half closing his eyes. A solemn hush fell; the service began. He followed the congregation as it rose and sat in hymn and prayer and lesson; but he moved mechanically, without thought of worship. To him had come again that vague sense of battles fought and won, the faint blurred echoes of distant music. The man in the pulpit, feebly struggling against a sense of futility, was preaching to him. But the dreaming youth did not understand; the gentle, sometimes plaintive voice could not dispel his vision. Often his glance sought the far corner where a shaft of morning sunshine had set a mass of yellow hair ashimmering. The sight and his dreams gave him a new and daring resolve. The hour sped swiftly.

“Unto Him . . . be glory and majesty, dominion and power. . . . Amen!”

The solemn stately words died away in a whisper. Again fell the brief reverent hush.

The youth awoke to the fact that the congrega-

tion was beginning to disperse. He went quietly from the church; in the yard he took a station by which the farmer folk must pass to their vehicles and there, as he had resolved, boldly, in the eyes of all, he waited for her. Young farmers, on their way to hitch up, saw the eager figure and passed sly comment. He was not disturbed. The spell was still upon him; for these heavy-witted jokers he had but the explorer's contempt for timid unimaginative stay-at-homes.

She appeared, a slender girl who, as she moved slowly around the church, wove a spell over the betrousered portion of Bethel, even where she had not the subtle aid of dreams. She was not small but, neatly made, gave an effect of daintiness not characteristic of the maids of that valley. Heavy flaxen braids—almost lifeless in the shadow, burnished gold in the sunlight—framed a dainty face, not regular in feature but clear-cut as a cameo and of a coloring so delicate as to seem almost pallor; a spirited face, girlish, and when occasion called, appealing. Dainty, too, were the white muslin dress, the pink hat with its nicely knotted ribbons, and at least in advance of the fashions regnant in Bethel; over her shoulder, at graceful angle, slowly twirled a small white parasol.

Whence this dainty blossom amid the less comely if more florid daughters of Bethel?

Into the valley, three years before, had strayed a plausible gentleman who discussed education;

8 THE AMBITION OF MARK TRUITT

in particular, education as dispensed at Miss Smith's Seminary for Young Ladies, an institution of Concord, forty miles away. And so glowing was his eloquence that Squire Martin, measuring cube roots and Latin declensions against his hard won dollars, sent his youngest daughter to acquire what he had not; what could the honest squire know of those higher things discussed and learned in seminaries for young ladies? There had been born an intimate acquaintance with *The Ladies' Home Journal* and kindred magazines.

And for the rest, there were her hands, white and soft; her sisters', to take no wider example, were rough and red. For Unity was supposed to be "delicate", hence was spared those arduous tasks that leave so little time to study of beauty hints and fashions. If there were some to suggest that "Squire Martin's family let Unity make fools of 'em," at least no males were among these critics.

Self-conscious to the finger-tips but not betraying it, she picked her dainty way among the gossiping groups, tossing gay little smiles to this and that intoxicated youth, blissfully deaf to an occasional feminine titter in her wake. As with that mythological being who by her walk stood revealed a very goddess, so Unity's languid ladylike air proclaimed her finer clay. Unity would have been the first to admit that, though an unkindly fate had set her in Bethel, she was not of it.

And so she came to a halt beside Mark, looking

up with a smile that made him forget curious observers. The parasol continued to twirl lazily; he thought of a butterfly alighting only to fly away again.

“Good morning, Mark!”

“Unity!” His voice was low, tense, as though he announced some tragic happening.

She continued to smile; a family group, frank curiosity in their gaze, was passing. “Wasn’t Doctor Courtney’s sermon fine this morning! I thought—” The group had passed. “What is it?”

“I’m going away to-morrow.”

The parasol stopped suddenly in the tightened clasp. The pose fell from her; the vivacity from her face, leaving it very serious. One saw then that her extreme girlishness was only an effect, that she was at least as old as he. One saw, too, in the thin line of her lips and the set little chin why her hands were white and soft and her sisters’ otherwise.

“To the city? For good?”

“To the city. For good.”

“I am glad.”

“Glad!” he stammered. “I thought—I wanted you to be sorry.”

“Yes,” she nodded emphatically. “I’m glad—for you,” she added more softly.

He remained silent, an unreasoning, indefinite disappointment lingering. Something he wanted—he could not say what—was lacking in her words.

“Aren’t you glad?”

10 THE AMBITION OF MARK TRUITT

"Yes, but—" He dismissed the doubt. His eagerness returned. "I'm going driving this afternoon."

She became girlish again. "Is that an invitation?" with a demure little smile.

"If you want to go."

"Of course, Mister Solemn! Aren't you—" She stopped, apparently overcome with confusion for her boldness.

"Say it!" he besought thirstily.

There was a delicious moment of uncertainty, a breathless little laugh.

"My lover. There! I'll be waiting for you, just after dinner." And the butterfly fluttered away.

He went from the churchyard and followed the street past the point where it returned to its native state of dusty, weed-flanked, country pike. He came to a place where the road rose sharply and fell again. Mounting to the crest, he threw himself on the roadside and waited; thither Richard Courtney would come on the after-service walk that was his custom.

Before him lay the valley, a great wide basin encircled by a broken rampart of hills as yet unravished of their first growth. From its placid river, slender relic of the flood that had cut this fertile valley out of the rock, glanced the sheen of midday. A few billowing masses of snow-white vapor hung overhead; their shadows drifted lazily over hill and meadow. The breeze had fallen; through a heavy languorous stillness came the ceaseless song of the distant rapids. It was an hour of peace, of rest.

But youth thinks not upon peace, asks not rest. Sweep of valley, play of color on the hills, shining river and majestic frigates of the sky were to him but the background for a girlish figure that tripped lightly before him, looked up to him with alluring eyes. Youthlike, he invested her with charms ineffable, witting not that she whom he loved was but the creature of his own desire. Pride swelled within him—was not she, so much finer made than other women, to be his? Unworded but wonderful thoughts of her stirred. She fused with his dreams of the morning, interpreted them for him. For her he would endure the shock of battle, bring home the trophies.

The moment of disappointment was forgotten.

Up the rise, village-bound, leisurely creaked an ancient top-buggy. In it slouched a middle-aged man upon whose face were written humor and patience, qualities of which he had great need just then. His horse labored heavily at its task, head hanging low; not the bellows in Simon Truitt's smithy puffed louder or harder. At the crest it stopped without urging. Mark frowned impatiently. Then he noted the sad state of the horse and a grin displaced the frown.

"Hear you're going away," "Doc" Hedges remarked. "For the good of the town?"

Mark nodded, the grin widening. "Maybe you'd like to help pay my fare?"

"I have helped," the doctor rejoined dryly. "Going to get rich, ain't you? They all think that."

"It happens sometimes."

"You might, though. Any man ought to get rich that could sell me this—would you call it a horse?"

"Hmm!" Mark considered the animal judicially.
"Well, it has four legs."

"So's a billy goat," drawled the doctor. "Goat'd be more use to me, too."

"What did you buy it for, then?"

"I ain't squealing. Pretty slick customer, ain't you?"

The grin returned. "I can sell horses," Mark modestly admitted, "to some people."

"Humph! Only a fool'd buy 'em of you," the doctor agreed. "What'll you take for the brown mare?"

"The brown mare isn't for sale."

"Any horse is for sale," the doctor insisted, "at the right price. Give you a hundred and fifty."

"I wouldn't sell her for two-fifty."

"You won't have the chance, either. I'll throw in *Bucephalus*"—thus he designated his steed—"for boot."

Mark shook his head with an air of finality. "I've got other uses for the mare."

"Mean that?"

Mark nodded. The doctor sighed and clucked to the weary horse.

As it laboriously got under way, he leaned out of the buggy to call back, "Saw you sparking Unity Martin the other night. Hope you get her. She'll make you a"—he grinned sardonically and raised

his voice that his point might not miscarry—"a heap wise man, sonny."

Mark frowned again. The doctor was a distinctly discordant note.

Out of the dusty cloud trailing behind the creaky buggy emerged a tall stooping figure, clad in the rusty black of the country clergyman. He walked slowly, and when he came to the rise, with a slight effort; evidently he was a frail man physically. At the crest he stopped, breathing hard.

"Taking a good-by look at it?" he asked between breaths.

"No. Just waiting for you."

The preacher smiled faintly; the worn dispirited face lighted up a little. He turned his glance to the valley.

"It's worth a farewell. You'll be homesick for it sometimes—I hope. Shall we walk a bit farther?"

At his lagging pace they tramped along the road, constantly rising and descending but always reaching up toward a higher level. They kept the frank silence of those who have been companions often. Under cover of an apparent abstraction the preacher gravely scrutinized the youth, asking himself again the question that had been uppermost in his mind ever since he learned that the other was to take the path beaten by so many questing youths of Bethel.

Ten years before Richard Courtney had resigned the city congregation that was steadily withering under his ministry and had come to shepherd the

little flock of Bethel. It proved to be a life sentence, but in the end he stayed, if not gladly, at least with such Christian fortitude as a quivering sensitive soul could summon; having found—so he put it—a need to which he could minister. In the early days of his new service he had discovered a neglected, unlettered, moody youngster suffering under the blight of his relation to Simon Truitt, who, for his supposed atheism, was accounted a little less than respectable. Some quality in the boy caught the preacher's fancy. Tactfully he sought to win into Mark's heart, not a very difficult task once the lad learned that ministerial conversation was not confined to graphic pictures of eternal torment. And then, not quite realizing how this new interest eked out the Christian fortitude just mentioned, he set about to make Mark over. From Richard Courtney the blacksmith's son had had his Vergil and Xenophon and Homer, his Euclid and Quackenbos. What may have been best of all, he had had Richard Courtney.

And Richard Courtney had had Mark Truitt. Gradually the boy came to be the test of the preacher's service, the justification of his life which the shelved man craves. In the intense, imaginative, quick-brained lad he thought he discerned a rare spirit fitted to be a chevalier of the Lord, a fighter of others' battles, a bearer of others' burdens; thus we may read what Richard Courtney would have made his own life. He, the exile, had failed; but in

the larger life from which he had been banished he would live again and be felt through a fine strong man of his making. For ten years he had jealously surveyed the prospect, patiently toiled and prayed that it might be.

But now, when the day for which he had prepared was come, he was not happy. The question continually recurred. How well had he builded?

He was not, when he put aside the tinted glasses of hope, blinded by many illusions. He considered his work honestly: how incomplete, after all, it was; how vainly they strive who seek through parrot-wise repetition to impart the knowledge life alone can give, through much preaching and many books to give understanding. With suddenly clarified vision he beheld the youth at his side, raw, unshaped, the reaches of his soul as yet unlighted by purpose, unwarmed by inspiration. After ten years he was almost as Richard Courtney had found him.

"I have scoured the windows. I can not give the light," thought the preacher sadly.

They came to a moss-covered watering-trough that stood at the roadside. Mark went to it and leaned over to drink.

"Wait!" commanded the preacher.

"But I'm thirsty."

"Wait!"

With a smile Mark obeyed. He was used to queer commands from this man. They went on, each busy with his own thoughts. Courtney's ques-

tions continued. Had he failed again completely? And why?

He became aware that Mark had broken the silence. "I—I owe you a lot," he had said.

"Not very much," Courtney sighed. "I wish it were more—much more."

"Oh, yes, it is much. You've taught me to read and talk and—and think." Courtney repressed an unhappy smile. "You've made me—see big. You've got me ready to go away from here. I—I appreciate it."

"I'd rather you could see true. But must you go?" The plea was without spirit; he knew its uselessness. "There's a life to be lived here, even by a man who sees big. I wish you would stay, at least for a while."

"No, I must go now. I've a reason you don't know."

The preacher felt a jealous pang.

"I," he thought, "for ten years have been giving my best thought, my best prayers, to the making of this boy. . . . A pretty face crosses his path, and in a moment my fine creation shrinks to this passionate young animal—merely shrewd where I would have him big, exulting in strength where I wanted him to rejoice in service, desirous where I have taught him to aspire. . . . I have failed again."

After a while he said aloud, "Did you by any chance hear my sermon this morning?"

Mark looked away, uncomfortable. "Only part of it. I was thinking pretty hard."

"Of yellow braids and a pretty complexion," Courtney said to himself bitterly.

Mark was frowning in an effort to recall and piece together detached phrases that had floated to him during the service and then, finding no welcome, floated away. "It was about," he said hesitatingly, "it was about a man finding his big idea."

"I am flattered." The dry droll inflection was a concealment.

"The big idea," said Mark vaguely, "does it mean —God?"

"It's His way of lifting the world forward. It's—" Courtney stopped abruptly, with a hopeless smile. He looked away across the hills.

Suddenly, with an oddly appealing gesture, he turned again to Mark. All the intense longing of the man who has dreamed and failed and yet clung to some fragment of his hope, painting his vision, breathed in his words.

"Some day you may remember I told you. It's the big purpose that sometimes comes to the big passionate man, to accomplish some work for its own sake; that grips him, drives him, makes him ruthless to his own desires, forgetful of his failures and blind to everything but his task; that transforms him into a narrow zealot, a fanatic, but a power—always a power, because he is his purpose incarnate. It is that without which the big man is

18 THE AMBITION OF MARK TRUITT

wasted, because he is that dangerous useless thing, a force uncontrolled. . . . It's what I wanted you to have."

Mark stared. "I—I'm afraid I don't understand."

"And I," Courtney cried, "I can't make you understand! But you will know, when it comes to you." The fire began to die from his eyes and voice. "If it comes," he added.

"What is your big idea?"

The man looked at him queerly.

"Ah! You shouldn't have asked that," he answered, in quick relapse to the odd dry inflection. "If I were not as I am, I should say—you."

And again Mark had to say, "But I don't understand."

Courtney did not try to enlighten him. "Let us go back," he said. They retraced their steps down the undulating road that led into the valley.

They had passed the watering-trough again before Mark noticed it. He stopped, pointing back to it.

"I think," he smiled, eager to soothe the disappointment he felt but could not explain in his mentor, "I understand that. I'd forgotten I was thirsty."

"You think so?" Courtney answered, almost roughly. "But you don't understand. Though that, at least, is something life will teach you—and before long. . . . You will forgive me if I am a bit sharp. I am a little disappointed to-day—in myself."

For a while Mark considered perplexedly this outburst. Then he dismissed it as one of the incomprehensible moments of a man whom, despite oddities, he liked very much. He returned to the thought that had led to the moment.

A little timidly he made the offer. "I'm going to leave the brown mare with you, if you'd like her."

But he needed not to fear. The moment had passed. The man who was big enough to suffer but not to achieve was gone; only the faded mild-mannered preacher remained.

"It's good of you to think of it. But you can sell her well. And you'll need the money."

"I know. But I want you to have her. I traded to get her for you."

Courtney would not spoil his pleasure. "Of course, I—" His acceptance halted. "No, give her to Doctor Hedges."

Mark shook his head. "I want *you* to have her."

"He needs a *good* horse. The one he has—"

"It was a fair trade," Mark asserted defensively.

A turn of the road brought them within sight of a great hill that stood across the valley. Over its level top swept breezes filtered pure through many leagues of forest. "Hedges Hill" the village called it, finding humorous matter therein.

Courtney pointed. "That is where the doctor wants to build his sanatorium for consumptives."

"I know. He's cracked over that. He'll never do it."

20 THE AMBITION OF MARK TRUITT

"Perhaps not. It would be too bad. It," Courtney added quietly, "is his big idea."

Mark looked long at the hill, as though from the site of the sanatorium in Spain might be gleaned some hint of the meaning of the "big idea."

After a while he said slowly, "Would you really rather he'd have the mare?"

CHAPTER II

THE PATH OF YOUTH

HAD Richard Courtney thought to look back to his own adolescence, he might have understood his failure.

Mark, whose life, the preacher supposed, was to be made over by many books and sermons on purpose, unselfishness and clean living, was in fact seeing a miracle of quite another sort unfold within him.

Companionship, once sought, had suddenly become distasteful. He was happy only when wandering alone in the woods, idle gun on shoulder, or drifting lazily in his canoe. In his wanderings river nook and forest were peopled, not as in former time by the bold fraternity called forth from his books, but by cloudy exquisite figures that danced before him and then whisked provokingly out of sight. To see a fluttering skirt in the distance or hear unexpectedly a ripple of girlish laughter was to put him in an inexplicable but delicious tremor. And no one taught him to understand the miracle.

Sometimes, shyly, ashamed without knowing why, he asked questions of Richard Courtney, but always he was put off with carefully inconclusive answers.

The unwisdom of maturity that seeks to blind budding youth to the first vital fact of its existence! The knowledge—of the fact of an instinct, not of its relation—could not be denied him. He won it out of the air, from other boys beholding the same miracle, from chance sayings of the loafers around the stores. Once, left alone in Courtney's study, he strayed upon a volume of *Arabian Nights* from which no prudish hand had subtracted; instinctively surreptitious, he carried it home.

The first ecstasy of sex knowledge passed. He added to his years and stature and was put to work in his father's shop. A while, for the most part, a new interest pushed his revelation into the background. The labor—not hard or prolonged—he liked. To swing hammer and sledge and feel them grow lighter in his grasp, to see the red iron taking form under his blows, were to him a joy, not a task. Congenial toil awoke another instinct: he wanted to “do something.”

But the urgent first instinct, never quite asleep, stirred at capricious intervals, the more imperative for its lapses. At such times he would flee to the woods or river to feast his eyes and imagination upon the sensuous shadowy shapes his fancy conjured. And once, pretending a two days' hunt in the hills, he stole by a roundabout way, on passionate quest, to Concord. He returned, not ashamed but disappointed. And this, for him, was the interpretation of his miracle; he felt that a gross deception had been put upon him. In the reaction he re-

nounced his miracle, utterly and forever—or so he thought.

After a period, during which his body shot up to its full height, wholesome toil and study busied his thoughts and Richard Courtney began to nurture vain hopes, occurred an event of no small importance to many young gentlemen of Bethel. Unity Martin, proud possessor of a diploma declaring to those who cared to peruse that she had mastered certain arts, came home to exhibit in all its perfection the product of education.

He was returning late from an afternoon's hunt in the woods behind the Martin farm, when he unexpectedly came upon her one autumn day. She was standing on a little knob, gazing absently into the fading sky. His ever ready imagination was touched. In the dusk, the pale glow of the dying day upon her, her pensiveness and apparent frailty gave her a seeming of soulfulness that abashed him, moved him strangely. He thought he beheld one far finer and purer than any of the clayey creatures his life had touched. She saw him and smiled faintly. That smile put him in an agony of confusion and awkwardness. He felt he ought to steal quietly away from this holy place into which he, gross and hulking, had blundered; at the same time, like the apostle of old, he had some notion of building a tabernacle and residing permanently on the spot.

Because he did not know how to depart, he found himself walking home with her, and when she praised the pheasants slung over his shoulder, on a

sudden glad impulse he gave to her and she quite naturally accepted the trophy of his hunt. This was a prophecy, but he was no seer.

It was long before he lost that impression of her, the frail spirit-like girl of the dusk, even though riper acquaintance might have taught him that she was indeed a dweller upon the earth. And this was a new miracle, far more wonderful than the old ; he in nowise thought of connecting them. He used to stand abstracted before the forge fire, seeing her face in the glowing embers : a folly indulged intermittently between fits of feverish industry. He whispered her name to himself, thinking it finest poetry. He suffered a profound humility, an exceedingly painful consciousness of his total depravity, and an ardent zeal to achieve nobility—under her pure inspiration. His desire to “do something” became a burning impatience to do large and splendid deeds that would prove his mettle. He was, in a word, a boy who thought himself in love.

And she? She saw his desire and was glad. For though there were castes in Bethel, his elders spake of his promise and he had grown good to look upon, desirable even to the diplomaed daughter of Squire Martin. And she, too, had her visions of a larger life.

Came a night, a still winter’s night when moonlight gleamed on the snow and the chimes of sleigh-bells added to the enchantment, when he kissed her, with a sense of sacrilege—and she did not resist.

No wonder, then, Richard Courtney preached

purpose in vain! His pupil's horizon was filled with a purpose not his own. Even the preacher's incomprehensible outburst was forgotten, as the boy went to his tryst that Sabbath afternoon.

For a mile he drove carefully and then, letting out the mare, with a flourish of speed drew up before the house of Squire Martin. It was the most pretentious in the valley, big and white, with iris-lined walks and hollyhocks growing along the fence; heavy masses of moon vines hid the wide porch. Not without quaking, our cavalier perceived Susan, eldest daughter of the squire, in the front yard. With an effort Mark put on what he fondly believed was a confident air.

"Good afternoon, Susan. Is Unity 'most ready?"

Susan smiled broadly. "She's *been* ready half an hour," she treacherously declared, "but she's still primpin'. Won't you come in an' visit a while?"

"No, thank you," very politely. "I'll wait out here. The mare won't stand."

"Then I'll go in and hurry her up. That is, if you really *are* in a hurry!" she drawled mischievously.

He grinned feebly and mopped his brow. She went into the house.

Soon Unity appeared, fresh and dainty in her white dress and pink hat, followed by Susan bearing a heavy pasteboard box. While Mark awkwardly helped his lady into the buggy, Susan slipped the box under the seat. Mark got in and the brown mare, needing no command, started away.

26 THE AMBITION OF MARK TRUITT

"I put up some lunch," Susan called after them.
"Don't forget to eat it!"

"And so," breathed Unity, "you're really going away—at last! How did you happen to decide to go just now?"

Mark knitted his brow in the effort to make clear what he himself did not understand—there were so many things he did not understand, this day! "I don't know. It just came to me the other day that I couldn't stay here any longer. Somehow, ever since we began to talk of the city, this place has seemed so small and shut in—until this morning."

"Until this morning?" in some alarm.

"Then it seemed kind o' cozy and—and protected. I hate to leave it. I hate to leave you, Unity."

"And I'll hate to have you go. But, of course, you must. And then, before very long, you'll come back—and take me away with you."

For a while in silence they gave this prospect the consideration it deserved. Then:

"Unity!"

The brown mare, in the belief that she had been addressed, leaped forward. When she had been restrained to a sober gait, Mark began ecstatically to unfold the inspiration that had come to him.

"Unity, why can't you come with me—*now?*"

"I wish I could," she sighed. "But, of course, that's foolish."

"Foolish? Why? I've a little money now and I can make a living for us both. I'm not afraid of work." He stretched out his driving arm; the other

was engaged. "There's a lot of work there, I tell you."

Her admiring glance thrilled him. "Yes, I know. And I'm so proud of you. But we must be practical."

"You—practical!" He threw back his head and gave his silent laugh. He was at heart proud that she was not practical; ordinary girls possessed that commonplace quality.

"Yes, I am," she insisted stoutly, "very practical. And it's never practical to take what you want until you can have it—as you want it."

"But isn't that what we want—to be together? And it would be easier if we could make our fight together."

She shook her head. "No, it would be harder. I'd only be a drag. And you can get on much faster if you have only yourself to think of for a while. We just mustn't think of it."

His disappointment was plain. She hastened to relieve it.

"You know," she purred, "I'm not very strong and I couldn't do much to help. And it'll be harder for me than for you. You'll be having your work and the new life to think of, while I can only—wait." As she said it she gave him a pathetic picture: Penelope, patient and faithful, waiting through leaden-winged months, mayhap years, for her wandering lord's return. He became very contrite that he had forgotten her frailty.

"Oh, Unity, how can you love *me* so?"

She was able to answer him on this point in a way to satisfy him and yet leave him humbly grateful for his vast good fortune.

The brown mare warmed to her work. The staccato of hoofs upon the smooth valley road became sharper, quicker. Meadow-land and stubble-field, here and there a patch of waving corn, were swiftly passed. Unity had taken off her hat; the afternoon sun fell upon her hair, touched it into life. One wisp, loosened by the rushing wind, lay across her forehead, a slender fillet of fine gold. Her eyes danced, the tinge of color in her cheeks deepened in the joy of speed. She seemed so girlish, so trusting, so undefiled by all evil or selfish thought, and withal so fragile! He caught her close in a sudden impulse of protectiveness.

They turned into a hill road, a rough way that the mare took slowly. Throughout the afternoon they wove a careless course, sometimes through long stretches of cool shade, again over some sunlit crest from which they saw other hills rolling away, billow after billow, until lost in the blue haze. Their senses warmed; they committed little follies of speech and love-making; they laughed a great deal upon the slightest excuse, or gravely discussed problems of domestic economy. The thought, never far distant, of the coming separation added a not wholly disagreeable tinge of melancholy that made each hour the sweeter.

The shadows were quite long when they espied a great flat rock in a clearing a little way from the

road. And there, in a delicious intimacy that they solemnly asserted was but a foretaste, they remembered to eat the lunch put up by the thoughtful Susan. Afterward they spent a rapturous hour watching the sun glide down to meet the hills. He wondered, would she think him altogether foolish if he told her of the music he had heard in the morning?

She broke a long silence to say dreamily, "You're going to be very rich, aren't you?"

He laughed. "Maybe. It isn't always so easy to get rich, you know."

"But everybody says you will."

"Everybody—in Bethel—may not know." Then he added firmly, "But I will—for you. And then—" He paused as one who views a prospect beyond his powers to describe.

But he did not mention the dream music, after all.

All at once shadow was everywhere. The sun had gone. But into the sky, with prodigal hand, it flung from its retreat behind the hills the promise of a fair to-morrow. For a while the two on the rock gazed into a lurid shifting splendor.

He got down from the rock and lifted his arms to her. She stood uncertain, looking down at him. The glow of the sunset was still upon her; in her eyes was another glow, from within, for him.

She measured the distance to the ground—it was almost her own height—then, with a gasp for her daring, she sprang into his arms. He caught her and held her, kissing her again and again, thirstily.

She began to respond; her arms tightened around his neck; she clung very close. Suddenly she pushed herself away and stood looking at him through startled eloquent eyes. And he knew that for once he had awakened that which filled the want he had felt in the morning.

She cried tremulously, "Oh, Mark, you won't forget me—out there. I—I couldn't bear—that."

"I will not forget."

A last bright shaft reflected from the crimson west flooded their little clearing, fell upon her. And that was the picture of her he carried "out there"—Unity in the sunset glow, eyes and cheeks aflame with love, desiring him only and not that he would win.

In the little laboratory back of his office Doctor Thomas Hedges was busily concocting and labeling his medicines for the next day's rounds. He yawned often and gapingly; he was very tired and sleepy. He had been up all the night before, ushering a new life into the world and sadly seeing another pass out; and he had been able to take no rest during the day, thanks to the broken-winded horse a "pretty slick customer" had induced him to install as successor to a lately deceased comrade and servant.

He was disturbed by a suspicious sound from the direction of his stable.

"Those boys again!" he muttered.

Lighting a lantern, he stole out quietly. He was

astonished to discover, not mischievous boys, but the figure of a man hitching a horse to a buggy.

"Hi, there!" the doctor shouted. "What are you doing in my stable—with my horse?"

He ran toward the stable, swinging the lantern violently around his head. But the intruder went on, unmoved, with his buckling of straps.

Then the doctor recognized him. "Eh? So it's you! I knew you were a horse-trader, but I didn't know you stole 'em this way."

"Do you suppose I'd steal *this?*" was the cool rejoinder. "I'm just making a little trade."

"Without my consent? Well, of all the high-handed—"

"Hadn't you better look in the stable before you fly off the handle?" Mark grinned.

The doctor took the suggestion. He was heard swearing softly to himself, as in the light of the lantern he inspected the substituted animal. The doctor, though a church member, was in moments of stress given to mild profanity. He emerged, blinking stupidly.

"Eh?" He went out to Mark, and holding up the lantern, stared intently into the young man's face.

"Well, are you satisfied?"

The doctor began to chuckle. "That damn person!"

Mark climbed into the buggy and gathered in the reins. "Is it a trade?"

The chuckle was getting beyond control. "Go! Go *quick*—before you come out of that trance. And,

sonny," as the horse started, "here's some advice—that you won't take. Don't go away. Stay with the parson—for the good of the town and your immortal soul."

But Mark was gone.

The changeling had been put away in the brown mare's stall. Mark slowly crossed the yard to the little house that was to be Simon Truitt's lonely abode—that had been, it suddenly struck the son, Simon's lonely abode. A light shone from the kitchen. Through the window Mark caught a glimpse of his father at the table, sitting bolt upright, staring dully, steadily at nothing, a figure of hopeless endurance. More than once, coming upon him unexpectedly, Mark had found him so and had thought nothing of it. What, Mark now wondered, did he think, what bitter morsel taste, during those long silences?

"Little late, ain't ye?" Simon greeted him. But there was no reproof in the words, and no question; he assumed no right to pry into his son's affairs.

"I've been taking a drive," Mark answered.

Simon rose and went into the pantry. He returned, carrying a pitcher of milk and a plate piled high with buttered bread.

"I kept this ready fur ye. Thought ye might be hungry."

Mark was not hungry, but he ate with a show of great relish. Some instinct told him not to decline this little service.

"Father," he announced, "I swapped horses with Doc Hedges. I gave him the brown mare."

Even Simon could show surprise. "Why, I'm pleased ye did that. . . . Did Courtney ask ye to?"

Mark laughed queerly. "Doc said, 'That damn parson!' But I wanted to—after I'd thought about it," he added.

"I'm glad ye wanted to," Simon answered simply.

A little later he broke another silence. "Guess ye're purty glad to git away from here?"

In the morning Mark would have answered with an unqualified, "Yes." Now he said, "I am—and I'm not." He drew a long breath that was almost a sigh. "It's like going in swimming in April."

"Ye're right to go," Simon said. "I wouldn't want ye to stay. There ain't any prospect fur a young man round here."

He rose, and going to the cupboard, fumbled among the dishes. When he returned, he laid before Mark a worn pocketbook of leather. Mark opened it and glanced at its contents.

He looked up questioningly. "Why, there must be 'most a thousand dollars!"

"Jest that. I've been savin' it fur ye."

Impulsively Mark pushed it back toward Simon. "But I can't take it. It won't leave you anything, and I don't need it. I've got more'n five hundred of my own."

"I'd ruther ye'd take it," Simon insisted heavily. "It'll come in handy. If ye don't need it, ye can find

a safe place fur it. An' ye can pay it back, if ye ever git rich. I," he repeated, "I've be'n savin' it fur ye. I knowed ye'd go away some day an' I wanted ye to take somethin'—frum me."

Mark's hand went slowly to the pocketbook. "All right, father." The words fell awkwardly. "I'll pay it back some day. And—thank you."

"Ye're quite welcome," answered Simon with quaint formality.

He went again to the cupboard and took down a battered tin candlestick. He lighted its candle and started toward the inward door. Half-way there, he stopped abruptly and turned, his mouth working strangely.

"If ye ever git rich," he dragged the words out slowly, even painfully, "come back here an' build a steel plant. There's a heap of fine coal an' iron in these hills, an' the river an' railroad'll give ye good transportation. This valley's meant fur it. I was jest a little too early—an' a little too ignorant, I reckon. But ye're smarter an' better schooled than me, an' the time's comin'. I'd like to see a Truitt build it."

Never before had Simon Truitt spoken of his dream and failure to his son.

"Why, yes," Mark answered, on a sudden pitying impulse, "I'll think about it."

"Yes. Keep thinkin' about it. It's—it's a big idea."

Mark started. The phrase again! Simon went to the window and peered out into the silvery night—

toward the south. Then he moved heavily toward the door. He turned again; the flickering light from the candle threw the lined patient face into sharp relief.

"Good night, Mark."

"Good night, father."

The door closed. For many minutes Mark, left alone, absently fingered the pocketbook and thought of the man who had given it to him. Then he blew out the lamp and rose from the table.

He, too, paused at the window and looked out into the night, toward the south. He tried to see the sleeping valley as his father dreamed it, alight with the fires of many furnaces, palpitant with the rumble of many engines. He thought he saw it.

The picture faded. He saw only a vague shadowy mass in a moonlit meadow, the dismantled forge, silent witness that for those who march upon the battle-field that is called industry is no third choice. They must conquer—or be conquered!

CHAPTER III

THE MASTERS

H E found himself, a lonely foreign figure knowing not whither he would go, somehow in the city's heart. A gathering fog—not the silver-white mist that sometimes lightly enshrouded Bethel, but a thick murky pall that oppressed the senses—had brought twilight while it was yet only late afternoon. The crunching of wheels and the shuffling of many feet upon the pavement rose in a harsh hissing roar, unceasing, monotonous. Movement—dizzying, feverish, kaleidoscopic movement—was everywhere, tiring the eye, a picture that shifted always and yet was always the same. It was the hour of which he had dreamed; his promised land lay before him. And it was indeed, that first plunge into the teeming city, like diving into April waters.

Chance led him to the principal thoroughfare. The city had begun to quit its toil, and the released toilers were pouring into the street, an endless un-ordered horde, heedless of him as they were of one another. Never before had he seen so many people.

He had a confused sense of being sucked into a narrow gloomy cañon through which poured a flood of humanity, a treacherous dangerous torrent

with many cross-currents. Countless faces, wan in the unnatural twilight, streamed by him; a stranger type to him, fox-featured, restless of eye. All sorts, all ages: a curious, hurrying, self-absorbed multitude, niggardly of time in which it was rich, prodigal of strength in which it was poor. The tumult and incessant movement bewildered him. He wondered that the human face was capable of so many variations, what gave them all that strained anxious look and why they hastened as if under the lash of some unseen master.

The shock of a disappointment as yet undefined chilled him. Never had he felt so alone. He thought wistfully of his hills and river. Something he had dreamed was lacking. . . .

There was a corner where two cañons met and their streams mingled in an elbowing mob. A pinched furtive face looked up at him, grinning impudently.

"How's the crops, Si?"

At the same time Mark felt a tug inside his coat. He was being pressed upon from all sides but, notwithstanding his bewilderment, his hand instinctively went to protect the precious pocketbook. It found and closed upon the hand of the thief. The pocketbook settled back into its rightful place.

That was a grip to make a man writhe. The thief writhed, his face distorted with pain and fear. He cursed his captor.

"Damn you, let me go!" he hissed.

Mark let him go as he would have freed a slimy

serpent. The pickpocket squirmed through the crowd and was gone. No one had seen.

Farther on he was halted again. A shriek rose even above the roar of the street. He followed the crowd that gathered and over many heads caught a glimpse of a crushed bleeding form prostrate under a heavy dray. The onlookers pressed close, not in helpful interest but in a morbid curiosity to him more ghastly than the torn flesh. An ambulance came and carried the hurt one away. The crowd resumed its hurried march, absorbed once more in its divers cares, the tragedy forgotten.

The incidents oppressed him. They seemed to define his disappointment. He came from the clean silent places where life is held dear and men, even strangers, meeting howsoever casually, were used to part lingeringly, regretfully. But here in this gorge through which the city poured its flood of men he felt—he was too dazed to think—something far different: life cheapened by its very multiplicity, lives isolated, even more surely than by hermitdom, by the knowledge of their cheapness.

Soon a riper understanding was to set in order that first impression of the city crowd—the pale-faced throng, weaklings most of them but taught to fight with the venomous desperation and unscrupulous craft of those who know that to go down in the mêlée is to be trampled forever underfoot; all lacking sense of fellowship, none secure in his neighbor's faith, having lost through unnatural contact all real joy in the human relation. But even

then, with only instinct and quivering senses to teach him, he felt in each passer-by an aloofness, a shrinking from others, an ill-veiled hostility and suspicion. It troubled him; though he had come dreaming of conquest, it was to be in a friendly generous struggle that should know no bitterness and leave no sting. But *this* was no sham battle!

He wandered on. And, senses blurred by too many impressions—or, perhaps, instinct groping deeper—he began to feel, not the presence of many men, but a monstrous indivisible entity—the driving master, the city itself!—with many tentacles out to drag down the unwary, ruthlessly crushing the laggard weakling under its heavy tread; the roar that rang in his ears was but its sinister menacing voice. He could not translate what he saw into terms of his dreamed conquest.

He caught the pace of the shifting crowd.

Full darkness fell. He paused under a fiery sign, The Seneca. Through a great plate-glass window he saw a gaudy red-and-gold interior broken by many columns that to the inexpert eye somewhat resembled marble. Uniformed pages skurried to and fro. Well-dressed men lounged in easy chairs or sauntered leisurely about. Many lights burned brilliantly. He looked within longingly.

While he debated whether or not to enter this expensive-looking hostelry, a porter swooped upon him and snatched from his hands the ancient carpet-bag that held his slender wardrobe.

“This way, suh!”

He hesitated no longer; he had need for some abiding-place, some fixed spot that should restore his sense of stability. He followed the porter to the desk, painfully conscious of the figure he cut, uncouth, out of place. A clerk of lofty mien placed an open register before him.

"Write your name here."

Mark wrote it.

"And your town."

Mark hesitated—and then, with a dogged lowering of his head, firmly wrote the name of that city.

But after the shock even of April waters a moment of reaction comes to the healthy, when the blood leaps and the tissues glow.

In the dining-room that night many smiles were cast at the raw country youth. He did not regard himself as a subject for mirth. As he attacked the strange viands the waiter set before him, a little of his self-confidence returned. The vivid sense of a cruel overpowering entity faded. Homesickness for Bethel, the refuge, subsided. To be a wanderer in the crowded street was one thing; to sit at this luxurious repast—his standards of luxury may have been somewhat crude—was quite another. He began to think comfortably of the fat leathern pocket-book now reposing in the hotel safe. By so much at least he was armored against the rapacious monster that stalked the weak and unwary; more, he shrewdly guessed, than most of those on the street could boast. And perhaps, after all, this monster might be tamed to service.

He began to take in details of the novel scene around him. The big room with its shaded lights and lively diners, the hum of many voices accented by an occasional tinkle of woman's laughter, the strains from the orchestra—whose shortcomings he was not competent to detect—at once soothed him and stimulated his depressed fancy. He discovered a taste for this sort of thing, which amused but in nowise alarmed him. The waiter called him "sir"; never before had he received this badge of superiority. That, too, he liked.

His ears strained to catch the remarks that floated to him from the neighboring tables. It was a strange tongue he heard, lightly dismissing topics that would have busied the gossips of Bethel for a moon. There was a young man who wore diamonds and talked in a loud and impressive fashion.

" . . . Elizabeth, I see, ~~s~~ broke the record again." (Elizabeth, it developed, was not a race horse, but one of the Quinby Steel Company's blast furnaces). "Yes, *sir!* More'n forty thousand tons. Henley says—I think so myself—we're going to have the biggest steel year yet. —No-o, I don't just exactly *know* him, but I know people that do. —And Tom Henley's going to be the biggest steel man in the business—gets his fifty thousand a year already. . . . MacGregor and Quinby? Oh, they're the *richest*. They let the others make the steel while they make the money. See? Ha! ha! . . . Tom Henley's the *brains* of the Quinby crowd. And he's the damnedest speculator. . . .

42 THE AMBITION OF MARK TRUITT

Worth his half million, they say, and ain't over thirty-five. . . .”

And this was the city from another angle. Tom Henley, evidently, had the monster well in hand.

The name had a familiar ring. Mark drew from his pocket a letter Richard Courtney had given him that morning. Upon it was inscribed, “To Thomas Henley, Esquire.”

“He may be willing to help you find work,” Courtney had said, “if he remembers me.”

Mark had accepted it carelessly, with no intention of using it. He asked no favors; he felt no need of the crutch of another man’s help. But that was in the morning.

Now he regarded the letter thoughtfully. He wondered what was in it. After a moment’s hesitation he opened—it was unsealed—and read it.

“My dear Henley,” the letter ran, “I am sending you one who is the work of my hands. He is a young man of parts, ‘good friends,’ as we say up here in Bethel, ‘with work’. Also he ‘has a nose for money’. They are qualities for which you, perhaps, can help him find a market. . . . I say he is my handiwork; but he is an unfinished product. What, I wonder, will the new life that succeeds me as his mentor make of him? Perhaps I should let him strike out for himself and learn at once the ugly cruelty of the struggle that now seems to him so glorious. But we oldsters have the habit of helping youth to the sugar-plums of which we have learned the after-taste. . . . And this introduction is the last thing I can do for a young man who means much to me.”

After many minutes' study Mark came to his decision. He would present himself and the letter to Thomas Henley. And since time seemed an asset not lightly to be squandered, he would do it that very night. He rose from his dinner.

"Where," he inquired of the supercilious clerk, "does Thomas Henley live? I must see him tonight."

"You mean *the* Thomas Henley?" Even Mark could see a melting in the clerk's manner at the mention of the magic name.

"Is there more than one?"

The clerk laughed as at a clever witticism. "You're right. Not in this town. You go—" Here followed certain directions. "Can't miss it. It's a big new house—biggest around there. *He* does things on a big scale."

The directions brought Mark at length into the heart of a small community from which the city still kept at a humble distance. Not so the fog, which was no respecter even of gilded colonies. From a tall iron fence sloped a wide sweeping lawn dotted at exact intervals with trees and shrubbery. And in its center loomed a great shadowy mass, punctured by many windows shooting broad luminous bars into the fog. It was the castle of the tamer. Mark gaped and tried to compute what fraction of Bethel could be housed under its roof.

He proceeded with a boldness proper to adventurers in Eldorado, past the waiting carriages that lined the graveled driveway, to the wide veranda. There

he halted. From within came the strains of music and a gay clamor of voices. He could not know that on this night the tamer gave a feast, a formal dedication of the new castle to the entertainment of his kind. But he felt the hour to be ill-suited to his purpose.

Yet it was effected.

Curiosity to look within carried him to a window. To his wondering gaze unfolded a vista of Irish point and damask satin, carved mahogany and marble figures, gilt-framed pictures and silken rugs. A chandelier of a thousand crystals let no detail flourish unseen. How cheap now seemed the gaudy splendor of the hotel dining-room, how ignorant the taste of him who had admired!

And amid this lavish display of beauties paraded a bevy of creatures seeming to his excited fancy to have stepped out of *Arabian Nights*. You, madame, who remember the fashions of the middle eighties may not be as moved as he; your sophisticated eye may discern, in some trick of manner or contour of hand, evidence that for these ladies the day of luxury has but lately dawned; your exquisite and more expensive taste may carp at those jewels engaged in a duel of scintillation with the glittering chandelier as out of place upon shoulders and fingers that can hardly have forgotten the burdens and tasks of the plebeian household; you may even regret that physical culture has not yet come to check the fattening processes of gluttony. But bear in mind that all things are comparative; look with the

eye of the peeper and see, not a room "done" by a tasteless hired decorator, nor a group of vulgar over-dressed women, but a trophy—a trophy in an Homeric struggle that makes youth drunk with the desire of conquest.

"Unity," he said, "will like that." There spake the sure conviction of the prophet.

While he stood there a troop of men, garbed in a monotony of black and white, marched into the room. At the same time voices came from another wing of the veranda.

And then he, son of the blacksmith of Bethel, became a spectator at the birth of a project that for a brief but brilliant period was to move the world to hosannas!

"Henley," said the first voice, deep, yet softly flowing as honey, "I have come to the time of life when a man of sense puts away the lusts of the flesh—"

"Is your digestion out of order?" interrupted the second, sharper, less musical and with a sardonic quality that delighted the listener. "I noticed you didn't eat much to-night."

"Ah! It is more than stomach. It is *soul!*" the mellow voice flowed on. "My labors and investments have been blessed with good fortune. So I am now able to turn my energies to the higher duties, to doing large things for humanity. And lately my thoughts have dwelt much on—philanthropy and paleontology."

The speaker, like Brutus, paused for a reply.

"Hmm! Two 'p's,'" it came. "Quite alliterative. Go on."

"Henley, you are the first to whom I have spoken of my purpose. It is fixed. In what nobler work, what more fertile philanthropy, can a man of wealth engage than in the development of the science of paleontology? Think, Henley—to add to humanity's knowledge of the extinct life that came before our own! It is a labor to fire the imagination. And that is my purpose. I shall build and endow in this city the most complete paleontological institute in the world, and before I lay aside the project, a branch institution in each of the largest cities of the nation." The voice trembled with emotion.

There was a sound as of two hands sharply meeting. "Good! I see! Let the Scotchman look to his laurels! MacGregor may build his libraries, but Quinby shall have his paleontological institutes!"

Mark wondered at the patience of the answer. "Ah! You are pleased to jest. But the project is new to you. And," sighingly, "the young think only of wealth and power."

"My dear Mr. Quinby," the other purred, "no man in his senses could jest at paleontology.—What the devil!"

The speakers had turned the corner of the veranda and come upon the eavesdropper. Thus for the first time Mark Truitt looked upon the two men in whose legions he was to conquer.

Who has not in fancy's gallery a portrait of Jeremiah Quinby, taken from the prints of the day

when his star swept so brilliant through the sky? His great rival and pattern in beneficence rejoices in an outward likeness to the popular notion of Santa Claus; Quinby seems philanthropy in the flesh. The lofty brow seems to shelter a very ferment of noble projects. The grave eyes and mouth speak to us of a great soul anguished by the sight of suffering humanity's needs, which he is bravely, self-effacingly seeking to relieve. His tall form is clothed in that princely manner we expect from givers of royal gifts. . . . The portrait lingers undimmed. For, though it came to an untimely pause, the inspired enterprise that night divulged was not wholly in vain. While paleontology lives, so long shall the fame of Quinby endure, proof against the thrusts of cheap satirists and illustrated by many photographs.

Photography has been less kind to Thomas Henley. No philanthropy has claimed him as its apostle. And then he was a less promising subject for the art. His body was squat and heavy; his face was bony and ugly and arrogant, often still further marred by a cold cynical sneer. A lesser man, thus presented, would have been repulsive. Yet from Henley radiated a tremendous vitality that made him magnetic or compelling as he chose—the dynamic quality that could galvanize a man or a regiment to the mad effort he demanded. After the first glance Mark looked no more upon Quinby; he understood why the philanthropist had so meekly swallowed the insolence.

"This," he thought, "is a man."

Henley charged upon him, gripping his arm.

"What the devil," he repeated, "are you doing here?"

"Looking into the window."

"What are you doing that for?"

"Because," Mark answered simply, "I never saw anything like it before."

"Probably," the philanthropist-to-be suggested nervously, backing away, "he is some sneak thief. Perhaps you'd better hold him while I get help."

"Oh, don't be frightened," Henley replied protectively. "I won't let him bite you."

The sardonic note was again uppermost. Mark, looking down at Henley—he had the advantage of his captor by half a head—grinned involuntarily, and was himself led into impudence.

"No, I won't bite you, Mr. Quinby."

Quinby took another step backward, his nervousness becoming more manifest. "He knows my name! He may be some crank who—"

"My dear sir!" This time there was a touch of impatience in the words. "Gentlemen of your importance must expect their names to become household words. If you'll feel easier, step inside while I attend to this Peeping Tom."

The philanthropist, still insensible—it seemed—to the thinly veiled insolence, accepted the suggestion.

"Now then," Henley demanded sharply, "what do you want here? You don't look like a sneak thief."

"I brought a letter to you."

"Who from?"

"Doctor Richard Courtney."

"Who's he?"

"He's our preacher in Bethel."

"Bethel? Elucidate Bethel."

Mark defined the village geographically.

"Humph! Let me see the letter."

Mark gave the missive to him, and Henley, opening it, began the perusal.

"Hmm! 'Young man of parts'—'good friends with work'—'nose for money'—hmm!" He looked up suddenly, fixing a keen scrutiny upon Mark.
"What is your definition of sugar-plums?"

Mark's grin was a confession. "I'd like some."

"Humph! So you've read it. How many letters like this do you suppose I get every day?"

"A good many, I expect."

"Dozens!" Henley snapped. "Dozens! Enough, if I gave 'em all jobs, to cover the Quinby mills three deep with incompetents in a year."

He completed the perusal of the letter.

"Well," he sneered, "you who peep through windows and read other people's letters, I suppose as a young man of parts you want a nice fat job you're not fit to fill? They all want that."

Suddenly Mark felt anger, hot anger, at this arrogant young man, not so many years his senior, who baited philanthropists with as faint scrupling as he rough-handled the seeker of work. Henley saw him stiffen.

50 THE AMBITION OF MARK TRUITT

"No, I don't," Mark cried hotly. "I only want a chance to work. A chance to show what I'm good for."

"If that's all you want—what are you good for?"

"I'm a blacksmith, but I can do anything."

"Humph! We can use fellows who can do anything—to swing pick and shovel. Do you know where we're building our new plant?"

"I can find out."

"Go to the labor boss and tell him to give you a job with the construction gang. If you're good for anything, you can work up the way I—no, not the way I did, but the way you'll have to if you want to get along where I'm running things."

"All right," Mark said shortly and turned on his heel.

"Hold on, there!"

Mark stopped. Henley carelessly tore the letter into bits.

"It won't be a plum, I warn you. But if you've been properly taught," with an ironic chuckle, "you know, of course, that such fruit is only for the very, very deserving—and after they've proved themselves. As for your Doctor Richard Courtney, I have no present recollection of him. So you'd better look elsewhere for a nice soft job. Unless," he added with another sneer, "you really think there's something in you?"

The gratuitous contempt stung into life something of which Mark never had known the need—the fighting spirit, which not all dreamers possess.

He glared. He remembered afterward that he had not been the least in awe or afraid of the Napoleonic young man who bestowed insult so indiscriminately, whose arrogance and insolence seemed but the same voice that spoke in the roar of the street. Henley, too, saw; also he perceived that he was in imminent danger of a thrashing. Amused interest flickered across his face.

"Well?" This was not a sneer.

After a little the answer came.

"I want that job."

Mark went out into the fog.

CHAPTER IV,

THE SERVICE OF THE STRONG

TO THE nation had come a rare passion for building. It was tearing down its old barns, to build anew, bigger and stronger. There were cities to be raised in the deserts; and they must be made stanch and lasting. Wildernesses were to be tilled and taught to bring forth their fruits; and the pioneer and his harvest must be carried, not by crawling conestoga and mule-train, but by the power of steam. Men would go down to the sea no longer in ships of wood, but in floating palaces that mocked the storm. Those who made war were to be sheltered behind impenetrable ramparts and, again, equipped with engines and missiles before which stoutest defenses crumbled. Toilers on land and sea must find in their hands new weapons, hard and keen and sure, to bring nature, her forces and treasures, into bondage and service.

Therefore, steel!

And, therefore, the army of steel workers. They came from many lands, Saxon and Celt, Latin and Slav. But only the strong—here was no place for the weak or the uncertain. Death lay in wait in a thousand forms and it took its toll even of the strong. More terrible still was the need for fierce

unrelaxing effort to satisfy the world's hunger for steel. It made young men old, quickly crushed and threw aside all save those who had endurance of soul as well as of body. These survivors were apt to forget that a natural law, and not they, had called the vast industry into being, and in the end their generals went mad with the lust of a baser metal. But they bred a few that were really giants, gave civilization an impetus that has not died, and set a new ideal of productivity.

A strong west wind had sprung up during the night and the sun shone clear on the line of that day's recruits. One by one they passed before a keen-eyed youth—only the young officered this army—who, after one glance, accepted or rejected. The enlisted were turned over to the timekeeper, who gave them numbered cards and assigned them to various waiting squads.

A big Swede, a wiry little French-Canadian and a slow-moving Pole were passed. Then came one whose shabby clothes spoke of another sort of toil and whose face showed the marks of prolonged intoxication.

"Can't use you," snapped the boss.

"But, mister, I'm broke and—"

"No place to work off jags. Step out—next!"

The man turned dejectedly away. His place was taken by an Italian boy.

"Speak English?"

The Italian jabbered unintelligibly. The boss pointed toward the rejected drunk.

54 THE AMBITION OF MARK TRUITT

"Step out!" He interpreted the command by a shove that sent the immigrant reeling out of the line. He nodded curtly to the next applicant. "All right! Get your card."

And this recruit was he who had accepted Thomas Henley's challenge. The latter had already forgotten the incident, but Mark was still hot with the determination to prove his mettle to the tamer.

He gave his name to the time-clerk and received his card, also the command, "Go with Houlahan's gang."

Thus, he reflected, he had taken the first step in his campaign of conquest—he was a private in Houlahan's squad. To himself he emphasized the fact that he had got so far without Henley's aid, although—for reasons he had not time to analyze—he did not regret the encounter with the tamer.

"Git a move on!" thundered a voice in his ear. "D'ye think yez arre a prathy shtuck in th' grround? Marrch!" It was the voice of Houlahan.

Mark marched. He had a last view of the rejected drunk and immigrant staring wistfully at the departing gangs.

Corporal Houlahan had no romantic conception of his duties, and his tyranny was of a sort to give his underlings the realistic point of view. The Alpha and Omega of his theory of bossing were to curse and threaten constantly; thus a deadly fear of him should be instilled and prompt obedience and faithful work insured. It is a simple theory and a popular, but unfortunately fallible; which, per-

haps, explains Corporal Houlahan's brief sojourn in these pages.

"Phwat th' hell arre yez thryin' t' do?" This to Mark, who, with some vague notion of proving his mettle at once, was plying his shovel almost frenziedly. "D'ye think yez arre th' whole gang? Ye got t' worruk all day, d'ye moind!"

But this, even if criticism for criticism's sake, was wise counsel, and Mark, strangling a rising desire to assault his commander, slackened his pace.

Less intelligent was the charge to the Swede, Mark's immediate neighbor.

"Here, ye Oly—"

"Ay bane Johann."

"Ye're Moike, 'f Oi say ut," bellowed Houlahan. He enlarged upon Johann's dishonorable pedigree. "Dig in!"

The Swede, the best worker in the gang, began to shovel in a nervous haste that added nothing to his efficiency. Mark saw the red creep into the fair skin.

"Shtir it up, ye Frinch loafer!" the corporal addressed the next in line. "We're runnin' no barber shop here. F'r two cints Oi'd bate some worruk into yez." But as well seek to expurgate the works of Monsieur de Maupassant as the comments of Corporal Houlahan!

This was not the varied leisurely toil of the country smithy, but a steady monotonous grind—thrust and lift, thrust and lift, the livelong day—calling into play only one set of muscles, with no flying

sparks or shaping metal to stimulate the artist's fancy. An unwonted ache began to creep into the sinews of our adventurer. And from behind, more wearisome than the toil, came always the harassing profane criticism of the insatiable Houlahan.

It was a tired and sadly fretted gang the noon whistle relieved. Mark stretched himself out on the ground, closing his eyes on the dinner pails his comrades produced; in his eagerness to be enlisted he had not thought of his midday meal, and he was very hungry.

He felt a hand on his shoulder and opened his eyes. The Frenchman and the Swede sat beside him.

"M'sieu ees 'ongree, eh?" The Frenchman carefully broke a loaf of brown bread—all his meal—in the middle and proffered Mark one-half.

"Un' t'irsty?" The Swede held out a bottle filled with cold coffee.

Mark looked covetously at the gifts, but he shook his head.

"M'sieu 'ate dat dam' 'Oula'an?" the Frenchman inquired.

"I do," Mark responded with fervor.

"Dat mak' fr'en's out of us, eh? Eat, m'sieu."

Hunger overcome scruples. Mark ate the bread and drank of the coffee.

"Much obliged. I *was* hungry. You're all right—" He paused inquiringly.

"Marcel Masquelier," the Frenchman completed the sentence.

"Johann Johannsen," rolled from the region of the Swede's stomach.

Mark identified himself.

"Dat ver' good name.—Br-r-r!" The exclamation was for the corporal, who, with the labor boss, approached. The latter glanced over the excavation.

"How many loads have you taken out?"

"Thirty-nine, sor."

"Only thirty-nine?" the boss rejoined sharply.
"It ought to be fifty."

"The dom'd loafers won't worruk," Houlahan defended himself angrily.

The boss cast his swift appraising glance over the resting groups.

"It's a good gang," he said shortly. "And it's your business to make 'em work." He passed on.

"We'll get it now," Mark muttered. "That Irish bully'll never know how to get work out of men. I'd like to tell the boss so."

Johann's face began to work. "Ay skoll kill Mister Houlahan," came his slow growl, "mebbe so."

"Mebbe so *not*." Marcel shrugged his shoulders. "One mus' leeve. An' one mus' work. Eh?"

"Steady, Johann!" counseled Mark. "Don't let him rattle you."

"You 'ear, Jo'ann?" Marcel added earnestly. "I 'ave respec' for w'at my fr'en', M'sieu Mark Truitt, say."

They "got it", indeed, that afternoon. The Irishman, under the sting of his boss' reproof, raged and

cursed endlessly in the effort to get more work out of his men. The gang, irritable and sullen, worked erratically, with feverish spurts that brought inevitable reaction; the men became demoralized, interfered with one another.

Mark, some whim of the boss making him a special target for the fusillade of profanity, was hard put to keep his temper in leash; he was harder put to restrain the mutinous Swede, who itched with a desire for assassination. Toward the end of the day even the philosophic Marcel grew ill-natured and snarling. Somehow Mark felt their hospitality of the noon hour had put upon him a responsibility for them, though they were his seniors by at least ten years.

"One must live, you know," he reminded Marcel. "And one must work."

"One mus' not be treat' like a dog, m'sieu." Marcel ripped out a long French oath. "Jo'ann, you 'ave my consen' to keel dat 'Oula'an."

Suddenly the Swede dropped his shovel. "Ay bane by endt. *Ja?*"

Johann was too slow in his mental processes to be shamed into patience.

"Pick up that shovel and get to work," Mark commanded sharply.

The Swede blinked stupidly for a moment, then slowly obeyed.

"You our boss, *hein?*" Marcel sneered.

"No, Marcel, since noon—your friend," Mark responded.

Marcel, too, stared and then, with a gesture of contrition, bent himself doggedly to his task.

Mark thought he heard a chuckle. He looked up to meet the eyes of the tamer. As to the chuckle, he may have been mistaken; in the keen impersonal glance was no sign of recognition. Henley, with the labor boss, departed on his tour of inspection. Mark gave himself anew to his work, with a sudden inner expansion. Not Henley, but the submissiveness of his malcontent "friends", was the cause of that expansion.

During the period of obscurity in the ranks the outward life of the great differs little from that of any other private. Day after day Mark reported for the long dull grind. Night after night he returned to the dingy little room he rented from Marcel and to the frugal supper Suzon had prepared. And out of his Saturady night pay envelope, after the week's expenses had been paid, always remained a small balance. Let this fact, since one taste had discovered an appetite for luxury, be set down to his credit. But let no one make haste to pronounce him a model young man. Clamoring desire he stilled with the promise that for every self-denial now should be an indulgence—"then".

There can be, however, no doubt that great commanders are made while in the ranks. Mark, for example, learned that there are a right method and a wrong of doing even the simple task of plying a shovel; that there is a fashion of handling even so common an animal as the day-laborer which brings

out his highest efficiency. He found, moreover, that he had the gift—granted as often to the false and the foolish as to the true and the wise—of popularity. Men liked him; they laughed at his jokes; on a day's acquaintance they confided to him their troubles—squalid tragedies they were, alas! only too often. Marcel always called him “m'sieu”, a distinction he accorded not even to Blair, the labor boss.

At first Mark did not look upon his gift as an asset. There were incidents to which a Boswell would give much space: here the encouragement of a ready sympathy extended, there the secret impulsive bestowal of the week's savings, again a weary night spent nursing a sick Italian. More than once, when Houlahan raged, Mark's steady whisper saved a comrade from flat mutiny and discharge. A Boswell would perhaps not disclose the fact that when he saw in his gift a talent capable of profitable investment, he began diligently to cultivate it. We may not be captious; Scriptural approval may be cited for the shrewd custodian of talents.

There was, however, no prophetic anticipation of the fact.

One chill foggy evening, as the whistle blew, he looked about him and realized that the excavation for the new mill was completed.

“Why, we're through!” he muttered.

Johann stared stupidly.

“Mebby dat Meestair Blair 'e geev us anudder job, you t'ink so, eh?” ventured Marcel hopefully.

"No. We're the rottenest gang on the work. It's Houlahan's fault. And I haven't had my chance. Damn him!"

"Damn!" The impending calamity was becoming clear to Johann.

"M'sieu 'as los' 'ees chance. Dat ver' bad. Jo'ann an' me, we 'ave los' a *job*," Marcel sighed.

But the fear was not justified. At the tool-shed they were ordered to report next morning a half hour earlier than usual. And:

"Truitt," said the time-clerk, "the boss wants to see you."

Mark made his way to the rude shanty that was Blair's office.

"Truitt," the latter demanded, "what's the matter with Houlahan's gang?"

"Too much bullying," Mark answered directly.

"I thought so. Report to-morrow morning."

"Yes, sir. Of course."

"I'm going to put your gang on the new coke oven beds. It's a rush job. I give you three weeks for it."

"Give me."

"Yes. I'm putting you in charge of the gang."

For an instant Mark stared foolishly. Then he grinned. "Would you mind saying that again?"

Blair complied. "Look here," he added boyishly, "I'm taking a chance on you, because you look and talk intelligent. Are you?"

Mark admitted it.

"Then prove it. I want to make a record on this

job and so you've got to. Houlahan," Blair added, "didn't—and he loses his job. See?"

Mark saw.

It is not easy to conceive Houlahan, late corporal in the forces of Quinby, as a proper subject for pathos. Yet so it is that even foul-mouthed Irish bullies may have their responsibilities—to wit, families of generous number—to bind them, though unwilling, to the service. In the morning Houlahan, too, reported, happily unaware of a new order of things.

"Houlahan," Blair announced casually, "Truitt will take your gang to-day."

Houlahan glared malevolently at Mark. Then into the red brutish face came the look of dread Marcel and Johann had worn for a little the evening before, a look Mark was to see often upon the faces of weaklings and incompetents weeded out of this Titan's service.

"An' where'll Oi go?"

"You can take Truitt's old place—or quit," said Blair curtly.

"My God!"

There was no resistance. As if dazed, the Irishman shouldered his pick and shovel and with the gang followed Blair and Mark to the new job.

You have seen a restive horse become docile and eager when a master takes the reins. So it was with Houlahan's, now Truitt's, gang. They were, since they had survived the weeks of bullying, no

mean type; and they responded gratefully to the changed leadership. Where they had been sullen and resentful, they now became willing and promptly obedient. Steady persistency succeeded spurt and reaction, with a consequent economy of energy and increase of efficiency. As the day advanced, the pace, instead of slackening as under Houlahan's command, grew faster; the last hour's record was the best of all.

And this was accomplished, not by the encouraging word or his quiet fashion of command or systematic division of labor, nor yet by all these combined, though to them in his ignorance he gave the credit; but by a process that can not be defined or acquired. He was able to infuse into his men a little of his own spirit, to stimulate their imaginations; they attacked their work as an enemy that must be destroyed, they felt with him an imperative need for achievement. It was part of his gift.

Perhaps the episode in which Houlahan figures added not a little to their zeal.

Mark's nice calculation, confronted by his predecessor, broke down. The memory of insult rankled; the temptation to take vengeance was too strong. Houlahan himself, sullen and intentionally slow, gave him the excuse.

Upon the poor Irishman rained a succession of barbed jests, varied by occasional outbursts in the true Houlahan style. Houlahan, no doubt, had much cause for resentment. He stood it, thinking

of his precious job, for more than two hours and then, badgered beyond endurance, threw down his shovel and stalked away.

"Stay on the job," Mark ordered sharply.

"Oi'll git me toime," Houlahan snarled back over his shoulder, "an' thin Oi'll come back an' bate yez into a powdher, ye—"

"Why wait? You might—forget."

The taunt stung the Irishman into a frenzy. He whirled and rushed at his persecutor. Mark caught up a pick-handle and waited. Marcel and Johann quietly took their positions beside him.

"Keep out of this," he ordered them.

Marcel and Johann stood fast. But it was not their presence that saved their new boss. More than an arm's length away, the maddened Houlahan stopped, glaring and panting with rage. Mark, his teeth showing in an ugly smile, met the glare steadily. While many seconds passed, that duel of eyes continued. The men, forgetting work, looked on fascinated.

There was no fight. Suddenly Houlahan caught the cruel message that leaped from Mark's eyes. His glance wavered to the poised club, his arms fell. Johann and Marcel resumed their shovels.

"Get back to work," Mark commanded.

"Oi can't shtand ut." Tears, most ludicrously, shone in Houlahan's eyes.

"Work like a man," Mark answered contemptuously, "and I'll let you alone."

Houlahan went back to work.

Mark, the ugly savage smile continuing, looked pitilessly upon his cowed opponent. The strong wine of mastery mounted to his brain.

Often he went home to his lodging by way of the mills. Then he began to spend his evenings studying them, sometimes in company with Blair, who when the day's work was done sunk his rank in a frank liking for his new lieutenant.

At first Mark saw only a vast spectacular chaos; a Brobdingnagian ferment of unordered and unrelated enginery and consuming fires. No guiding hand appeared, no purpose was felt. Some awful mischance that must bring the whole fabric crashing to earth seemed always to impend. It was unbelievable that this creation had been brought forth from the mind and by the hand of man.

Gradually to his accustomed eye the chaos resolved itself into a system—rather, a marvelous system of systems that worked with a single purpose, each unit fitting precisely into the ordered whole.

In a huge furnace, coal—already purified by fire in ovens that glowed through the night like red tortured eyes—was mixed with the ore rock. There was the sound of a rushing mighty wind, the hot blast that fanned this furnace seventy times hotter than that the Babylonish king prepared. The coal, the weaker element, itself the child of death, must die again. But not in vain; for by its death the iron was set free from the imprisoning dross. Forth flowed a golden deadly flood.

Sometimes it was allowed to cool and then was re-

melted in the cupola. Or, ere it could harden, waiting ladles caught the spouting stream and skurried away to a gigantic trunnioned tank. And there the liquid iron—two hundred tons of it, or more—was rocked back and forth, gently as a mother cradles her babe, future compass needle and rail and girder and armor-plate being churned into uniformity that, without hazard or doubt, they might be transformed according to their various purposes.

Thence the iron was passed into the converter, a towering vessel beyond the strength of men to lift but so delicately poised that a child could swing it to and fro. Suddenly the air was rent, the senses stunned, by a wild unearthly shriek. A chilled blast this; but, as it rushed irresistibly through the molten mass, by some strange alchemy the iron grew hotter and hotter, more liquid. But a greater wonder was worked; here the very force of creation was harnessed. With atoms of the rushing oxygen united and fled, in fiery embrace, the atoms of the drossy elements that weakened and coarsened the iron. From the mouth spouted an appalling geyser of multicolored sparks and orange flame that flung a ruddy circle athwart the night sky. Orange became violet, then white, glowed steadily. Slowly the converter inclined and into ladle and mold poured another lambent flood—the steel.

But the process was not yet complete. From above descended a great talon and rose again, clutching the mold. An incandescent pillar stood revealed, a

fearful thing whose breath seared. Again the talon swooped, seized the glowing mass and plunged it into a raging pit of flame, that while the still molten interior hardened the "frozen" crust might not become cold.

It emerged, solid, radiant and beautiful, for the last ordeal. A bed of cylinders received it. They began to revolve and the ingot, like some animate thing, darted forward to be caught between two crunching rolls. And thus, yielding little by little to the remorseless pressure, the steel was passed on from rolls to heating furnace and to rolls again, was crushed and roasted and sawn. Its violent ardor cooled; its terrible beauty faded. But so it was at last shaped to its ultimate purpose, made fine in grain and strong.

And back of it all, prologue to this drama, lay the whole record of human invention, beginning with the stone mallet of the cave-man. For the mills were an evolution, the sum of the mechanical achievement of countless generations that had toiled and devised, adding knowledge to knowledge, to forge the tools to make the mechanism that fashioned the steel.

The epic labor captured his imagination. The very cruelty of the task, sending men to match their fallible wits against forces before which their puny strength would have been worse than helpless, fascinated him. He looked almost in awe at those toilers—not yet had invention, never so fertile as in

this industry, thinned out their army and lightened their task—wrestling with bloom and billet and writhing red-hot serpents.

“God!” he exclaimed one night, overcome by the splendor of it all. He and Blair were standing on the bridge over the blooming mill, watching the half-naked troop that with hook and tongs worked a two-ton ingot over the rolls.

“What is it? What’s happened?” Blair looked around for an accident to explain the ejaculation.

“Nothing. I was just thinking how—how big it is.” Mark laughed at the feebleness of his words. “What would you give to be down there?”

There is such a thing as luck. A man—himself an artist who had not yet become exploiter—who had just come unnoticed on the bridge heard, and with a half smile, saw the eager face.

Blair shrugged his shoulders. “Yes, it’s big. But it’s hard work. Good pay, though.”

“I suppose so,” Mark answered carelessly. “I wasn’t thinking of that.”

The man spoke. “Good evening, Blair.”

“Oh! Good evening, Mr. Henley.” Blair struck a respectful attitude. “A bad night, sir.”

Henley looked at Mark. “I don’t just place you. Where have I seen you before?”

Mark flushed at the recollection.

“I took a letter I had for you and you caught me—” .

“So you’re Peeping Tom, eh? Did you get a job?”

THE SERVICE OF THE STRONG 69

"Yes, sir. With a pick-and-shovel gang. I'm boss now."

Henley seemed not unduly impressed.

"He's the man that dug the new oven beds," Blair interposed generously. "He did it in two weeks and three days."

"Two weeks and two days," Mark corrected eagerly.

"So long?" Henley continued indifferent.

"I had a spoiled gang. It took me a week to shape 'em up."

"Humph! That's what we pay bosses for. We gave you credit for that job, Blair."

"I took him out of the gang and put him on the job. But he did the work. He knows how to get work out of men."

And that was high praise—the very highest, Henley thought. He turned again to Mark. Beneath them, not ten feet below, a huge bloom passed. Its hot breath fanned them. Its radiance lighted up the face of the young man-handler; already the new life, the habit and desire of mastery, were setting their stamp there. Henley's interest was arrested. . . . After all, amid that profusion of terrific miracle-working forces, the human factor was the vital one—and, in the approximate perfection demanded, the hardest to find. This youth gave promise.

"Are you satisfied with your job?"

"No," cried Mark. "I don't want to be just a Hunky-driver. I want to learn how to make steel."

"It's easier to learn how to make steel than to be

a Hunky-driver," Henley said dryly. "However, I think we can find you another job."

When the new plant was built, it contained a novel equipment, a battery of furnaces in which the iron melted and boiled, with none of the converter's spectacular display, and became fine steel.

Here Mark laid aside for a time mastery over men and learned to master the forces that make steel. And this, too, may be accounted as luck. For the furnaces had been called "Henley's folly": therefore they were his pride and especial care.

CHAPTER V

CROSSROADS

IT had been an unusually stubborn "hard-tap", requiring quick heavy sledging to break out the hardened fire-clay and slag in the tap-hole. But the feat had been performed, the steel had gushed forth before the fatal decarburization could begin and the full ladle had moved away. The slag that had floated on the metal was now dripping into the cinder pit, sending up a shower of golden sparks.

Roman Andzrejzski, melter in charge of the furnace, was watching the scorched haggard face of his "second helper". That young man, leaning with an air of exhaustion and discouragement on his inverted sledge, was coughing violently. He had caught a heavy cold and the fine dust in the air irritated his throat and lungs. Moreover, it was the fortnightly double turn. He had been on duty twenty hours; four more and the heavy labor of charging the furnace yet remained. The prospect dismayed him. He had been just three months in the heat and toil the open-hearth furnacemen must endure and an unnerving fear was upon him: that his steadily waning strength would not hold out.

"Vat iss it? Zick?" Roman spoke in the slow

careful fashion that was his habit when he used English.

Mark shook his head. "Tuckered out."

"Tuckererd out?" Roman looked at him gravely.
"You drink too much?"

"I don't drink at all."

"That iss goot. Mineself," Roman explained naively, "I drink too much. Unt that iss not goot. But always haf I been very strong. It iss the double turn," he added. "It iss very hardt on the young. Later it gets not zo hardt—zometimes. Vare do you lif?"

"With a Frenchman in Rose Alley. Rose Alley—it stinks! It's too near the mills. I can't sleep for the noise. I'm tired and my head aches all the time."

"For two, three days then you must not vork but sleep."

Mark's red eyes darted angry suspicion at his chief. "I suppose you want my job for somebody else," he sneered.

"No. You are a goot worker. Unt I like you."

"All the same," Mark answered doggedly, "I quit when I have to—not before."

"You do not belief me." Roman shrugged his big shoulders. "Vat do you eat?"

"Oh, soup and brown bread and potatoes mostly. That's the trouble, I guess."

"Hundert t'ousandt defils! Zo little unt you vork here! You are American, you must eat. Vy you not lif another place?"

"The Frenchies sort o' think they're friends. They wouldn't understand."

"Zo? But here," Roman shrugged his shoulders again, "it iss a man must be for himself.—Ve vork now." They returned to their task.

Even double turns have an end. The night shift came on at last. At the trough for cooling tools Mark washed away the grimy sweat that streamed down his face. Then he donned a dry shirt and a heavy overcoat. Despite this covering his overheated body shivered when the raw, early April wind struck him.

"Vait!" And Roman was beside him. "I haf decitedt. You come lif by my house."

"I guess not," Mark answered wearily, "I guess you don't want me."

"I haf decitedt," Roman repeated. "You haf been goot friendts to your friendts—you vill be to us also. I haf a big house. It iss still there; you shall zleep unt not hear the mills. Unt my *Matka*, she iss goot cook. Unt meppy you make friendts vit my Piotr. He hass no American friendts."

"You might get tired of me."

"Zo? Then vill I tell you," said Roman simply. "Alzo, you vill tell us, ven you get tiredt of us. Unt you vill not be chargedt too much. You vill come?"

Mark hesitated, then laughed grimly. "Will I come!"

"Goot!" Roman laid a kindly hand on Mark's shoulder. "Now vill you belief me unt not vork till the coldt iss vell. You vill come to-morrow?"

And, the matter arranged, they parted for the night.

But as he trudged toward Rose Alley, Mark made a strange discovery: there is such a thing as an embarrassment of friendship. Marcel and Suzon, for instance. Since the day when Marcel had broken bread with a fellow laborer, he and his good wife had taken Mark into their hearts. Mark could assign no reason for this affection, but there was the fact. They had taken a proprietary interest in his promotion to Houlahan's job. They had exulted when he had moved up among those aristocrats, the skilled laborers. They had deferred to his opinions, as well as they could ministered to his wants, given him the choicest morsels of their scanty fare and generally regarded him as a superior being whom it was a delight to clothe with service and love. For Mark it had been a rather amusing, somewhat flattering arrangement—and until lately, quite convenient.

And now Marcel and Suzon were to be told that the arrangement had outlived its usefulness. The thought weighed astonishingly heavy, grew heavier as he approached the tenement and the unroselike odors of Rose Alley assailed his nostrils.

Marcel and Suzon were in the kitchen, the latter hovering anxiously over a pot on the stove. She turned eagerly as Mark entered.

"M'sieu ees ver' tire,'" Marcel announced, after inspection.

"Played out, Marcel."

"Jus' wait!" Suzon's face beamed with excitement.

"What is it?"

"A su'prise for m'sieu," Marcel explained.

More than once Mark had been amused by their glee over the prospect of a "su'prise for m'sieu", about which, like children playing a game, they always threw an air of great mystery and importance. He tried to play up to the part the game required of him.

"My! I'd better wash up in a hurry!" He passed into the little room that was his.

But something must have been lacking in his words, for Suzon's face fell. "You t'ink 'e will like?"

"Sure! 'E ees ver' tire', Suzon," Marcel encouraged. He nodded toward the covered pot. "Dat res' 'eem."

When Mark, washed—in the basin Marcel had filled for him—and a little refreshed, emerged from his room, the "su'prise" was ready. Suzon served it, three full plates of it, steaming and savory.

"Ah!" Marcel heaved a sigh of pride and satisfaction. "Bif stew!"

"With onion," Suzon amended, scanning Mark's face eagerly. "You like?"

Mark tasted it. "It's fine." It was. But the words rang hollow in his ears.

"Dat Suzon," Marcel proclaimed proudly, "she one dam' fine woman. She know w'at ees need' aft' de long shif', eh?"

"You're right, Marcel!" cried Mark, feeling a Judas or, at the very least, a Peter at the third cock-crow.

With every mouthful his resolution melted. It irritated him to learn that so much courage was required for a proceeding his reason assured him was entirely warranted. His effort, purely histrionic, to enter into the spirit of the "su'prise" was not a success; Suzon and Marcel laid it to his weariness.

When, after a pipe with Marcel, he went to his room, irritation increased. The room was scrupulously clean. But with its one chair and hard bed it could be only bare and cheerless. Through its window the roar of the mills came ceaselessly, rasping overwrought nerves, banishing sound restful slumber. Why *should* a man who made eighteen dollars a week and hoped, nay, proposed, to go much farther, live in a shabby tenement on an alley full of strange sounds and smells, where beef stew was a luxury to be enjoyed only on rare and ceremonious occasions?

"You're a soft-hearted fool," he addressed Mark Truitt angrily. "What are these grown-up children with their baby plays to you?"

He strode to the door and flung it open.

"Marcel," he blurted out, "I'm going to leave you."

Marcel dropped his pipe and stared. "Eh? You go back to de contree?"

"No. I'm going to live with Roman Andzrejzski."

"You goin' to— 'Ave I done somet'ing?"

"No! Oh, no! Certainly not! You've been fine to me. I—I appreciate it." Very eagerly, but with a painful sense of inadequacy! "It's just that I'm petering out—you can see that for yourself. I've got to go where it's quieter at night and the air's better and I can sleep and get better—get things to eat you can't afford to give me. Of course, I can't let you spend more than you can afford."

"We spen' all we 'ave, m'sieu," said Suzon quietly.

"We 'ave not done somet'ing—dat ees *sure*?" Marcel persisted.

"Sure, Marcel! I don't want to go. I've just got to—I'm not so strong as I thought. And, of course, we'll still be good friends and see a lot of each other and—and— You understand, don't you?"

Marcel sighed. He understood. "W'en our bes' eet ees too leetle, m'sieu go—dat ees righ'. But eet ees ver' sad—to me."

"And maybe"—the false hope was for himself as well as for them—"when we're both making more money, we can live together again. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, m'sieu." But Marcel sighed again.

"I t'ink," said Suzon, still quietly, "w'en m'sieu go, 'e forget dat."

"Oh, I can never forget, Suzon." He began an energetic resumé of their hospitality and his deep enduring appreciation. He proposed to watch closely for a chance to advance their interests—he insisted firmly upon that. They listened passively. Energy

is not always convincing, least of all to the orator. The flow of words slackened, ceased entirely.

"You understand, don't you?" he ended lamely.

"Yes, m'sieu," they said.

He stood for a moment in an awkward silence, then withdrew into his room. The silence in the kitchen continued.

He went to bed, but not to sleep. Nor were the mills and the hard couch wholly to blame. A sense of cruelty persisted, the keener for that Marcel and Suzon had made no demonstration. A sorrow, too, that was all for himself persisted. They loved him and it was good to be loved, even by homely, simple grown-up children who must pass through life yoked to the lot he would escape. He thought of the sum lying to his credit in the bank—in no week had he failed to add to his capital—and of the means of escape it afforded both him and them, if only he were minded to share his savings, or even his weekly wages, more generously with his friends. It amounted almost to a temptation.

Ah! but dollars were bullets in the campaign ahead!

"Why should I share with them? I'd be a fool to try to carry them up? I've got enough to do to get myself there."

So he silenced a beautiful impulse and lay, open-eyed, feeling the bite of a cruelty.

It was a little thing. But he was not the youth who had come, ignorant of life, to the city.

Victory, mastery, had intoxicated him; desire for them waxed hotter. But already toil, the driving toil that racked soul as well as body, was giving him a little of understanding—that for those who bore the heat and burden of the day the decent kindly ties were all that sweetened life and that, once severed, they were apt never to be cemented again. Yet another truth gleamed lurid: he who would climb out of the ruck of the toilers into the sheltered estate of the profit-takers must be ruthless to break these ties lest, clinging to him, they make his feet heavy for the climb. In the struggle to survive they were the price of survival.

But he saw as through a glass darkly. His sentimental compunction was a phase that quickly passed. Once he was settled in his new home, Marcel and Suzon soon went out of his thoughts and out of his heart—if, indeed, they had ever more than knocked at the gate of that citadel.

Roman's house, big only by comparison with three-room tenements, was on a quiet street on one of the city's seven hills. Mark was tucked away in a third-story room. Not even his fancy, less lively than in months agone but still fertile, could conceive the cheap bed and rocker, rag carpet and unpainted table as the trappings of luxury. But it was clean and comfortable, through its windows swept the clean air for which his country-bred lungs were starving and the mills were heard only as a subdued, not unmusical rumble. Also, immeasurable boon!

there was in that house a bathtub; his attendance upon it astonished even Kazia, who esteemed bathing more highly than did the rest of Roman's household. The *Matka's* cooking, supplemented by Kazia's arts, fell but little short of Roman's prospectus and the fare had substance.

For three days, hearkening to Roman's counsel, he did nothing but sleep and eat. His cold disappeared. His flagging strength revived. Then he gave himself anew to the endless narrow grind—toil, eat, sleep and toil again.

Roman's house, it is true, contained more than comfortable beds and a bathtub, a fact to which Mark gave at first but scant attention. There was Roman himself, in the mills a precise, patient, unflurried workman, outside a good-natured impulsive giant, with a child's ungoverned appetite. There was Hanka, his wife, always called *Matka*—mother—a drab, shriveled little woman who after twelve years in America had learned hardly a word of English. Piotr was a greedy, usually sullen boy of eighteen, still in high school, always bent over his troublesome books. He had a club foot and the heavy labor of the mills was not for him.

"Piotr iss a goot boy," Roman confided to Mark, "but he iss ashamedt that he iss Hunk. I am not ashamedt. He beliefs ven he iss smart with his books he vill be American. But," the father sighed, "Piotr iss not smart."

Also, there was Kazia.

At first Mark gave but passing notice to the girl who moved so quietly around the house, waiting on the table, sweeping and sewing. Having certain standards of beauty, he carelessly decided that she had none of it. Her hair and eyes were dark; all beauty, he held, was fair. She was tall, full-chested and strong; this denoted coarseness of fiber. She was indifferent, somber; daintiness and vivacity were indispensable to his ideal, and he suspected the existence of no subterranean fires. Her hands were rough and red; he particularly desired those members to be pretty in a woman. Her full rosy lips, he was forced to admit, would have been attractive if she smiled more, and her voice was pleasant. But Kazia talked little and seldom smiled in his presence.

That she seemed capable and industrious and had a certain hard sense in matters domestic; that without her ideas and quietly insistent application Roman's house would have been not at all the neat comfortable abode it was, grateful refuge for staggering young soldiers of fortune: these virtues also he was soon forced to grant to her. And very estimable virtues they were, no doubt—in Kazia, and probably unusual among girls of seventeen. But they were not, alas! the qualities that won diplomas from Miss Smith's Seminary for Young Ladies.

What hopes Roman may have cherished from the presence of a young American in his home were not at once realized.

Even when Mark had regained much of his

strength, the fear of physical collapse hung over him always. Of theories of training he knew nothing, but he saw clearly that, if he was not to stagger out of the ranks, done for—a common enough tragedy—there must be no waste of strength and no neglect to replace burnt-out tissues.

His body, which had gathered its never exceptional strength in the woods, on the river and over his father's anvil, could not quite adjust itself to the heavy toil, the glare of boiling steel, painful even when seen through dark glasses, and the nervous strain of the mills' incessant roar. There was no night or morning when he did not return ready, after bathing and eating, to seek his bed. Even with all the rest he could get his former bodily freshness and eagerness never returned.

He did not mean to be selfish. Sometimes at the end of a meal he caught Roman's wistful glance and felt uncomfortably that he was failing in an obligation. But always he went straightway to his room and his precious sleep, adhering rigidly to his routine—toil, eat, sleep and toil again—hoarding his strength as a miser hoards his gold. Had not Roman said, "A man must be for himself"? And always there floated before him a picture so sweetly pathetic as almost to invoke tears: Unity, the faithful Penelope, trustingly awaiting her adventuring lord's return.

Thus the life fashioned him. It was no longer self-denial that he might earn gratification at an-

other time, but self-control lest he go down in the mêlée.

But one night he discovered Kazia—the real Kazia.

CHAPTER VI

MELTING ORE

A GENTLEMAN, who must pass down in history as Mr. A, led to the discovery. Mr. A, an oarsman who could propel his boat five miles an hour in still water, undertook to row twenty-three miles up a river whose current ran two and one-half miles an hour, and back. The problem was: In how long did Mr. A accomplish this feat?

And upon Piotr fell the duty of finding the solution. Piotr felt painfully incompetent.

"Na milosc Boga!" When Piotr dropped back into Polish, deep emotion was stirring.

It was at the end of supper on a Saturday night when the other shift worked and Mark's rested for twenty-four hours. That day Henley, passing the furnaces, had spoken to him by name, leaving a glow that had not subsided.

"What's the matter, Piotr?"

"I can't work this problem."

"Let me see it." If we could but **measure** our impulses!

Piotr looked up astounded. "Do you know algebra?"

"A little." Mark took up the book. "Hmm! What's *x*? Why, that's easy."

He sat down and quickly worked out the problem. Then he led Piotr slowly through the equations thrice, after which he let the boy begin unaided a stumbling but finally successful pursuit of the elusive x .

While Piotr was floundering, his new mentor felt some one behind him. He glanced around and caught Kazia, her arms full of unwashed dishes, looking at him. The wonted indifference had fled before a look of surprised interest. Mark stared, incredulous; it seemed not the same face. But the new look vanished instantly. He had a sense of bafflement, as if he had come upon a rare picture just as a curtain was drawn.

"Fine!" he exclaimed, clapping Piotr on the shoulder; he had not heard the last few equations. "We'll make a scholar out of you yet, Pete."

"Pete!" The boy's homely face lighted up. "Kazia, did you hear? He called me *Pete*."

"I like Piotr better," she said, with a shrug that imperiled her burden.

"Do you," Piotr turned again to Mark, "do you know Latin, too?"

"Oh, a little!" Mark sought Kazia's face as this announcement of his erudition fell. But Kazia was looking away.

"And will you help me with that sometimes?"

"Sure. Sometimes," Mark assented recklessly.

But Piotr was insatiable. "Every night?"

"Well, no," said Mark, recovering caution. "Not every night. I can't—"

"Of course not, Piotr," Kazia cut in. "He can't waste time on a stupid little Hunk."

"I'm not a Hunk," Piotr resented passionately, addressing Kazia but for Mark's benefit, "any more'n you are. We are—we were—Poles. But we're Americans now. Why, I've almost forgotten how to talk Polish—except to the *Matka*," he added conscientiously.

"Will you help me to-night?" he returned to Mark, with less assurance. "It's Cæsar. And I am stupid," he sighed.

Mark, though repenting his rashness, could not well refuse. For an hour they listened while Cæsar unctuously told how he had taught the conquered Vercingetorix his place. But Kazia was not at any time present during the lesson. At last, yawning mightily, Mark arose. He went up to his room, bearing Piotr's awkward gratitude and followed by a look of humble admiration it is probably well he did not perceive.

But the incident had its sequel.

He found a light burning dimly in the narrow hallway before his door, and coming out of his room—Kazia.

"I was fixing things," she exclaimed, indifferent as ever.

"Thank you, Kazia." The room, as he remembered it, had been in perfect order. He stood aside to let her pass.

She took one step and then stopped abruptly, looking up at him with suddenly hostile eyes.

"What," she demanded, "did you come here for?"

He smiled—the smile of age for a naughty but amusing child. "Because your father asked me, I guess."

"But you know Latin and algebra and things."

"Why, what's that got to do with it, Kazia?"

"We don't. We're just mill-workers—and Hunkies."

He was not schooled in the reading of voices, but he caught bitterness there. He looked at her more intently—and more kindly.

"I'm a mill-worker, too. And I don't know much of those things really. What I do know is an accident. A preacher where I came from taught me a little. I'm not vain over it."

"But you know them," she insisted. "And we don't. Piotr tries, but he can't—he's too stupid." She threw her head back, in defiance of the contempt he must feel for them and their ignorance. "I could, but they won't let me. I can't even talk right—except what I pick up from Piotr."

"But you talk as well as I do, Kazia."

"No, I don't. You just say that. What," she repeated resentfully, "did you come here for? You don't like us. You won't have anything to do with us. You eat, then go up to your room and stay there. We thought you were coming to be friends with Piotr"—an almost imperceptible pause—"and me."

Amusement had quite gone. He had forgotten that he was very tired and sleepy. He had not

thought that dark eyes could be so expressive; in particular, that Kazia's could disturb the careful reasoning with which he had hedged about his exclusiveness. He was impelled to make his position clear.

"I come up to sleep, Kazia. You see, I was pretty near on my last legs when I came here and I need all the rest I can get. I'm not used to work in the mills and I guess I'm not so strong as I look. If I'm going to get ahead, I've got to do it while I can stand the work. Besides I didn't think you cared whether I liked you or not."

"I don't," she declared, with a little uptilting of her chin; it was a beautifully molded feature. The movement called his eyes to the slender yet strong and rounded throat. He wondered that these beauties had escaped his notice. "I don't. But Piotr and Uncle Roman do."

"Uncle Roman?" It was the first time he had heard the phrase. "I thought he was your father, Kazia."

In the flickering light he could see hot color suddenly rush to her normally white cheeks. She seemed to shrink away from him, as if in fear of a hurt.

"No. I—I have no father."

"Oh!" He assumed a bereavement. On a sudden pitying impulse he put out his hand and laid it on her bare forearm; the flesh was smooth and firm. "That's too bad, Kazia."

And then, most unexpectedly, the curtain was drawn aside for him.

"I won't be pitied!" With the cry fell away the Kazia he had known, as did Cinderella's tatters. In her place stood a girl who seemed taller, whose head was held in a fashion peculiar, in his books, to very proud and fine ladies. Her eyes blazed defiance. She snatched her arm away. "Here they're all ashamed. But I ain't ashamed. I won't have you pity me."

This was mystery. But he did not press her for an explanation. He was more interested in another phenomenon. He leaned forward, eagerly drinking in the details of the picture lest with the subsidence of her strange outburst it be caught away from his sight once more.

"Do you know you're mighty good-looking, Kazia?"

The angry crimson deepened. "You're laughing at me. You're—"

"But I'm not laughing." He caught her arm again, gently. "I'm only surprised. I didn't think you were. But you are—when you're interested or mad. Only please don't be mad, because—" What was this unconsidered thing he was saying? He was deliciously aware of the smooth warm flesh in his grasp. The words ran on.—"Because I want to be friends with you.—Don't you want me to stay?"

For a silent moment she looked at him strangely. It was early May. Through an open window the

night breeze, robbed of its fragrance by its sweep over the valley of mills, yet breathed a hint of spring, of renewed life, of bright warm youth. And she, under the flickering light, her eyes aglow, anger still flaming in her cheeks, was bright, warm, vital youth. The hand upon her arm tingled from the contact and tightened its clasp. . . . Insensibly, under his regard, the transforming angry defiance melted. But the transformation remained.

"Yes." She turned abruptly and left him, descending the stairs without so much as a glance backward.

For a full minute he stood looking at the place where she had been. Then he drew a long sighing breath.

"She's a queer one," he muttered.

Now it was the romantic habit of this young man, when he laid him down to sleep, to give his last waking moments to thoughts of her who was to wear the trophies of his battling. So the Moslem nightly turns his face toward the city of his prophet. Thus it was on that night. His thoughts dwelt conscientiously on Unity, in the fashion that is a lover's duty, until sleep, stealing close, treacherously set them to drifting rudderless.

The last to resist consciousness was, "Will she look the same to-morrow, I wonder?"

When he awoke, the late morning sunshine filled his room. But the eager expectancy pervading him, as if some long planned holiday had dawned, was more than a reflection of this outer radiance.

Then he remembered Kazia and her transformation; and that through the night he had dreamed of splendid tempestuous creatures with finely molded chins and white rounded throats and arms, the touch of which set a man to tingling. He laughed silently; how dreams could twist the fact! But he was curious—he called it curiosity—to see whether the transformation held.

He bathed and dressed carefully. And for the first time he perceived that his clothes, relic of Bethel days, lacked something when judged by city standards. He frowned at the image in the cheap mirror.

"I must buy a new suit," he muttered.

When he went down-stairs he found Kazia bending over a window-box in the dining-room where three scarlet geraniums flamed. She heard his approach and turned slowly. . . . No deceptive half-light, but the full glory of spring sunshine, was upon her. She was indifferent as ever. But the transformation held.

"Oh! Hullo!"

"Hello!" she said quietly, and moved away toward the kitchen.

"Kazia—"

She paused inquiringly.

"Er—" he floundered. "It's a fine morning."

"Yes," she said.

His remark, he felt, hardly justified her detention. He groped about for a more fertile topic. "Fine geraniums you've got there, Kazia."

"Yes."

"My goodness!" he laughed. "Is 'yes' all you can say? Don't you remember we agreed to be friends?"

"I said I wanted you to stay," she corrected, without enthusiasm. "I'll get your breakfast." This time she accomplished her escape.

He sat at the table, loftily amused. Probably—thus he considered her unresponsiveness—the poor thing still doubted his sincerity. And she had reason, beyond question; on the whole he *had* been selfish in his rigid seclusion. He must repair that.

Kazia, bearing his breakfast, interrupted his musings. He surveyed approvingly the dishes she set before him.

"You're a fine cook, Kazia. Now don't," he protested humorously, "say 'yes'."

Unsmilingly she ignored both the compliment and the jest. "Will that be all?"

"Well, no."

"What else?"

"You might," he smiled, "sit down and be—friendly."

"I've got to work."

"It seems," he complained, "you're always working."

She shrugged her shoulders. "That's what I'm for." And she left him.

He frowned. It might have been raining on his holiday. He was able, nevertheless, to make a substantial breakfast.

Back in his room, which she had set in order while he ate, he formally and finally dismissed Kazia from his mind and began his weekly letter to Unity. At the end of an hour "My darling" stared at him from an otherwise empty page, and he was glowering out into the sunlit streets and wondering why Kazia wanted him to stay, why her indifference of the morning and why his disappointment.

All along, it seemed, he had been taking an unconscious impression of her, which the acid of vexation now developed. She, for instance, when she spoke in that low-pitched musical voice, had, not an accent, but a quaintly unusual fashion of dropping her words that was—not to go out of his limited vocabulary—"very nice." Her face was really finely made, even in the judgment of one who had certain cameo-like features in mind; she seemed a cut, several cuts, above the plodding Roman and his family. In her direct-gazing eyes, he now remembered, were sometimes a fearlessness, a smoldering restlessness that suggested many possibilities to a youth into whose blood the fever of spring had crept. When he thought of it, he was surprised that he had not earlier perceived her prettiness; and that other youths had not discovered her—he took it for granted they had not. He now gave her industry and efficiency, qualities of which the mills were teaching him the value, a more than perfunctory appreciation.

Another hour he spent cataloguing her faults and virtues and charms. He was rather proud of this

new-found gift of analysis.. He did not, however, apply it to the interest that had grown up over-night, that grew as he analyzed. Nor did he look on it as the beginning of unfaith. His love for Unity was a fact fixed, unchangeable as the stars in their courses. An intruding question he snubbed with the answer that a lonesome mood had come suddenly upon him, that he needed company, anybody's company. Had he said "any girl's company," it would have been partly true.

A youth and his sweetheart strolled by below him. The sight, the music of their laughter, aggravated his restlessness and gave him an idea.

"That's it, exactly. I will go down and get Kazia and take a walk in the park. Poor girl! I expect she needs company, too."

He found her in the dining-room—and already attired for holiday sauntering! A ladies' seminary graduate might have been stirred to criticism of the cheap white dress and coarse straw hat with its single blue ribbon; he was not. We may doubt that he saw them at all, for her eyes were dancing and her lips smiling mischievously at Piotr, who sat in one corner, nursing his club foot and glaring fiercely at her. She could be gay, then!

But the smile disappeared upon his entrance. Nevertheless, "Kazia," he announced boldly, "we're going walking in the park."

"Are we?"

"Well, aren't we?" He modified his sultanesque air a little. "I'd like you to come."

"No."

"She's going with Jim Whiting," Piotr explained grumpily. "He's her fellow."

"Oh!" Mark blinked stupidly. Evidently other youths had discovered her. It was strangely disturbing.

He recovered himself, grinning wryly. "Serves me right. I took too much for granted, didn't I? I'm sorry."

"I'll go with you," Piotr volunteered promptly.

"Oh, all right. Come along, Piotr."

"Pete," corrected Piotr. "In a minute."

So, though not as he had planned, Mark sallied forth into the golden afternoon. Piotr, anxious to impress this wonderful boarder whose learning made light of the difficulties of Messrs. A, B and C and defied the intricacies of the subjunctive, talked, at first shyly, then more freely; mostly of himself, this being one of the two subjects in which he was deeply interested. Mark let him ramble on and listened to his own thoughts, which chiefly concerned Kazia. He ruefully wished that he had not been so ready to assume her assent.

Piotr's ambition, the monologue developed, soared high; it included notable achievements as a labor leader, although his notions of the historic conflict were a little vague.

"Are you union?" he interrupted his outpouring of desire to ask. By this time they were in the park, that rendezvous of lovers.

"Am I what?" Mark had not heard the preamble.

"Are you for the union?"

"Oh! No, I'm not."

Piotr's face fell. "The men," he remarked sagely, "ought to stand together against the greedy capitalists."

"But suppose you want to be a capitalist?"

"I'd rather be a labor leader. I guess I couldn't be a capitalist," Piotr naively confessed.

Mark laughed. "If there weren't any greedy capitalists, Peter, there'd be no chance for the labor leader."

Piotr's brow knitted over this novel problem, as tangled as the exploits of A.

"Where," Mark asked curiously, "did you get these notions?"

"I heard a man talking to father. Father," Piotr admitted sadly, "doesn't care. He's just Hunky. He thinks if he can work all the time and gets his pay regular, it's all right."

Mark answered with another laugh. Piotr looked up sharply, a painful suspicion stirring that knowledge of the classics did not give a man all. The flood of confidences ceased.

And then, as they passed the mouth of a little dell, they were halted by this tableau: Kazia leaning against a tree and Jim Whiting at her feet tying the shoe-lace that had come loose. He was unconscionably long about it, Mark thought. He must have said something, for she laughed, a clear ringing note. The kneeling gallant arose. Mark saw a man two or three years his senior, not ill-looking

despite his too heavy lips and loose jaw and "sporty" clothes. Mark disliked him at once. Whiting took Kazia's arm and led her slowly along the dell.

"*Psiakrew!*" muttered Piotr, in the Pole's deadly insult.

The homely face was pale, convulsed with hate and a real suffering. Even Mark, self-absorbed, could see that. He patted the boy on the shoulder.

"Never mind, Pete. She can't think much of him."

"He's not fit for her," Piotr cried.

"Right!" Mark agreed firmly.

Piotr went further. "Nobody's fit for her."

"Kazia's a mighty nice girl," Mark declared, less sweepingly.

"Yes, she's nice. And she's smart, too, smarter'n me. She's smart as *you*." Piotr looked up fiercely, as if expecting contradiction.

"Sure, she is! But I'm afraid," very casually, this, "she doesn't like me very well."

Piotr jumped at the bait. "She thinks you're stuck-up and selfish," he explained. "And she's always afraid everybody, 'cept Jim Whiting, 'll look down on her because her mother"—Piotr flushed—"wasn't married."

So *that* was the reason for her outburst of the night before. Poor Kazia! Mark had not needed to go out of virtuous Bethel to learn the lot of Hagar's children.

"Do you look down on her?" Piotr demanded aggressively.

"Of course not! And *you* needn't be ashamed of her, either—it isn't her fault, is it? I don't like," Mark said slowly, "to see her with that Whiting. I wish—I wish she liked me a little better."

He did not see the startled questioning look Piotr gave him.

"Kazia," asserted the boy, "never changes. I'm going home."

They strolled homeward, each moodily silent. As a holiday, Mark mused, the day had been less than a success. He wondered how one went about to earn a smile from Kazia.

A close observer—such as Kazia—might have noted during the following days, not a humility, but a perceptible shrinking of his assurance.

A foretaste of summer came to the city that week. Out of a clear sky the sun shone strongly. A hot southwest wind blew. Leaf and blossom leaped toward fulness. Children played merrily, passers-by on the streets smote each other boyishly on shoulders and spoke of the perfect weather. In the mills the steel-workers, craftsmen in heat, sweltered and suffered—and toiled on.

Even on night turn they felt it. More than ever did Mark's country-bred body pine for the sweet fresh air, his eyes for the restful green of the hills. No chill draft, reviving if dangerous, swept in to temper the hot breath of his furnace. Despite the comfortable quarters and nourishing food, now his strength lagged painfully; his scorched face be-

came haggard. And each morning he dragged himself wearily homeward, blind to the day's beauty.

But he did not forget Kazia.

Always a leech-like Piotr awaited his return, with problems to be solved and paragraphs to be construed. Nor did he wait in vain. Every morning Mark patiently sacrificed an hour of the needed sleep on the altar of the boy's rare stupidity. He did not look to Piotr's gratitude for his reward.

The direct charge into the mouth of the enemy's cannon is spectacular and heroic, but the great strategists have relied upon the movement in flank. On Friday Mark came within sight of the coveted position.

"There's three problems and a whole page of indirect discourse," the scholar announced. He added the complaint, "You're late."

"All right," Mark sighed. "Bring 'em out."

Then Kazia spoke her protest. "Piotr, can't you see he's tired?"

"But I can't do 'em." Piotr became sulky at once. "And I haven't failed once this week."

"Piotr, you're a greedy Hunky pig. Don't you do it," she turned to Mark. "Sunday's the double turn."

Was this the olive-branch? Nothing then could have persuaded him to give up the hour with Piotr. But he saw an opening; he unlimbered a big gun and sent one shell screaming toward her camp. "You," he said with crushing dignity, "will be walk-

ing in the park and won't care. Piotr, we're losing time."

She turned away so quickly that he could not judge his marksmanship. The lesson began and lasted until Piotr rushed off to school.

The double turn came and was dully endured, as are most of life's dreaded trials when they actually present themselves. But even Roman showed the effects of the long strain. When he reached home he began at once to drown his fatigue in huge potations. Mark went to his room.

There a surprise awaited him: clean clothes, neatly laid out—also Kazia, who had just completed this kindly service.

"I thought you'd like to clean up before supper," she explained with a new diffidence.

"Thank you, Kazia. You always think of the right things."

"No, not always."

She moved toward the door—anxious to avoid him, as usual, he thought. But he had no spirit for the siege just then. He dropped into the chair, burying his throbbing head in his hands. He supposed that she had gone.

But she had not gone. She stood uncertain in the doorway, watching the tired dejected figure he made.

"Not always," she repeated. The ready color mounted. "Sometimes I'm—cranky when I don't want to be."

He glanced up, bewildered by this sudden striking of colors.

"You look awful tired," she went on hurriedly.

He nodded stupidly, trying to grasp the fact that for once she was neither hostile nor indifferent. "It's the heat."

"It'll be worse in summer. It hurts even Uncle Roman then. You can't stand it."

He roused himself. "Yes, I can stand it—because I will." Richard Courtney would have detected a new firmness in the line of the grimly shut mouth. "Several thousand men stand it every summer."

"I hope so," she answered gravely. "When you say it that way, you make me think you can."

"I say it to make myself think so, I guess." He laughed shortly. Then he observed that she was wearing her white dress; the reason, of course, was obvious.

"Was it a nice walk to-day?"

"I didn't go."

"Oh!" He leaned forward, very eagerly for an exhausted man. "Kazia, do you still think I'm stuck-up and selfish?"

She shook her head slowly. "You've been so nice to Piotr this week, when you've been so tired."

"Kazia—" Before that honest gaze he, too, had to be honest. "Kazia, I did it to make you think that. But it was to help him you wanted me to stay, wasn't it?"

"No, it wasn't."

"Then why?"

Her eyes looked unwaveringly into his. "I don't know," she said slowly. "Because you're different, I guess. You know things. You—" A queer little frown of puzzlement furrowed the pretty brow as she groped for the words. She sighed impatiently, for the groping was fruitless. "You're just—different. I thought *I* could learn something from you—mebby."

"But you've been so—grouchy." He smiled to relieve this charge of undue gravity.

"I thought you didn't like us. And," she made a little shrinking motion, "I was afraid when you found out I am—"

"Don't!" He sprang to his feet and went quickly to her. "Don't say it! You're—Kazia. Do you understand? That's enough for me. It's a great deal, I think."

She said nothing, but looked wonderingly at him. He was dirty just then and clad in his homely working clothes, his face scorched and roughened by the furnace fires. She saw a young man such as life had not yet showed her, become suddenly kind and generous and—she felt it—eagerly desirous of her friendship.

"Will you go walking with me next Sunday, Kazia?"

"Yes," she said very gravely.

"Kazia," he pleaded whimsically, "you even laugh

for others—sometimes. Don't you think you might smile for me this once, anyhow?"

A smile quivered on her lips and was gone. But for a breath she lingered, her questioning eyes still upon him. Dusk was falling. In the gathering shadows the white figure gleamed softly—strong, vital, throbbing with the desire for life in its fulness—on the threshold.

CHAPTER VII

SOLDIER AND MAID

HE SAT a little apart from her, that he might see her the better. It had been a delicious game, spinning nonsense to lure her forth from the grave reticent mood upon her that Sabbath afternoon and then letting her lapse into gravity and silence once more.

He had found a surprising skill for it; he could play upon her and elicit just the note he desired. It had been so, ever since she had so unexpectedly laid down her hostility. But he was not quite sure which of the two Kazias he liked the better: her of the clear ringing laugh with its hint of daring; or the subdued pensive maid whose eyes wistfully sought the horizon.

The softer mood was upon her then. She sat, chin cupped in both hands, gazing out over the undulating acres of close-cropped greensward.

"You like it?" he queried.

She nodded.

"Huh!" he boasted. "You ought to see the hills up in Bethel. *They* don't look like they'd just been to the barber's. And you can always smell flowers somewhere." He sniffed reminiscently. "And the

woods! You'd like them. The trees are real trees, big fellows that have been there more'n a hundred years. You can get lost there. You start out with a gun and tramp, anywhere you take the notion. Sometimes you have to break through a half mile or so of brush higher'n I am—that's where you lose your bearings, but you don't care. Then you come to a stretch where the ground's clean and the sun shines through in spots. It's like a church on a bright day, only it's never quiet. You hear wood-peckers drumming and thrushes singing—I expect you never heard a thrush sing, did you?—and squirrels barking. Sometimes you flush a pheasant and he tears away with an awful racket—and you forget to shoot!—Are you going to sleep, Kazia?"

She kept her eyes closed. "I'm trying to see it."

He expanded under this tribute. "And there are bees. A bee's the funniest thing. He buzzes around, very excited, from one flower to another and then rises and shoots away for his tree. If you have a bottle you catch a few and let them out one at a time and follow them. Pretty soon you find the tree." He smacked his lips. "After a while you get tired and sit down on a patch of moss, with your back against a log, and half close your eyes. That's the best of all. People come—out of books, you know—"

"I think I know."

"—and you talk and have adventures. Of course, you're always the hero and *she's* the heroine."

"Who's *she*?"

"The prettiest one, of course. And then, all at once, just when things are most exciting, they all scoot, because—" He paused dramatically.

"Because?"

"Mosquito bite." She opened reproachful eyes upon him. "A mosquito, Kazia, 'll bust up the biggest dream a man ever had."

Such sallies had not before failed to draw her laughter. Now she only smiled, and faintly.

"You could leave *that!* Why?"

"To make money," he responded crassly.

"I wouldn't leave it for money."

"Yes, you would, Kazia. But I guess it's more than just the money. You see, in Bethel there's no chance, nothing to *do*; except grow old and nose into your neighbor's business and—and want the things you can't have."

"Don't they have to work there?"

He laughed contemptuously. "They call it work. I used to call it work. Only those stay who are afraid of what they'd find out here."

"You're not afraid of anything, are you?"

"Afraid!" And this was another sort of laugh. "I wasn't, when I came away. But now I am. Only sometimes you want things so hard you forget you're afraid and—" A half forgotten phrase from Richard Courtney came to him—"And are willing to pay."

"Yes," she said slowly, "I know."

"You know? Do you want things, too?"

"Want things!" She drew a long wondering

breath, as she measured desire. She did not wait for his question. "To be different."

They sat a little above the carriage road, along which rolled the Sunday afternoon procession of pleasure-takers. He pointed to an open landau in which two women sat, primly upright, hands folded in laps and faces set straight ahead, the very picture of well-dressed, self-conscious respectability—as "different" from Kazia as anything he could conceive.

"Like that?"

"Yes, like that. Sometimes." She looked wistfully after the departing respectabilities. "But mostly, just to *belong* to somebody."

"But Roman and the *Matka* and Piotr—"

"They're ashamed of me and afraid other people'll find out about me. When I went to school the other boys and girls said things—and did things. I didn't care." Her head went up and her voice told how passionately she had cared. "But Piotr told them at home and they wouldn't let me go any more. They'd be glad if I were gone. And some day—I will go."

"But where, Kazia?"

"I don't know," she said wearily. "If I knew, I'd go now. Some place where they won't know about me. Here nobody, when they find out, treats me like other people. Except," she added, "Jim Whiting."

"And me," he said gently.

"And you." She turned to look searchingly into

his eyes. "Don't it really make any difference to you?"

"I settled that question once for all last Sunday."

Her look of gratitude disturbed him strangely. He stirred uncomfortably.

She saw, but did not understand. She pointed to the sinking sun.

"See! It's getting late. I must go home and get your supper."

He took her hand and helped her to arise. But he did not release the hand.

"Have you liked it to-day? And will you come again?" He smiled down upon her.

In her eyes was still the look of gratitude of trust. "If you want to," she answered simply.

And they did repeat that holiday, more than once.

There were other episodes, too: chance—or planned—meetings in the hall, fragmentary conversations carried over from day to day, occasional intimate moments when tasks genuine or factitious took her to his room. A youth and a maiden dwelling under the same roof find many such opportunities.

Roman and the *Matka*, to whom Kazia did not do full justice, saw a change stealing over the girl during those weeks. It was as if she had determined bravely to accept her heritage and to wring from life the happiness owing to her. Her indifference frequently lapsed; she was sullen rarely and developed a new patience with Piotr; she smiled more

often and her laugh had a soft girlish ring. And once they heard her singing in the hall.

Roman gaped in astonishment. "Dost hear, Hanka?" he exclaimed in his own tongue. "She, our Kazia, sings!"

The song suddenly ceased and laughter, in two voices, rose.

Roman chuckled. "The young ones play a game. We played it, eh, Hanka?"

"It is an old game," she smiled.

"It is a pretty game. And our Kazia knows how to play it. She knows how to love—too well, it could be. She is like," he sighed, "her mother. But it is good for her. When she is married, she will have a place and people will forget."

"If he means it," qualified Hanka, who from her inconspicuity saw many things. "But it will break Piotr's heart."

Paternal pride did not sway Roman's judgments. "Bah! Piotr's heart is a stone. He is a stupid selfish boy. He loves only himself and his books. But Mark is a good boy. He is smart and a fine workman. He learns something new every day; already he knows as much as I. And he is watched from above—the big boss himself asks questions about him. And he is brave. He is not strong, but when stronger men curse at the heat and loaf, he shuts his teeth and works harder. Since he is brave, therefore is he good." To Roman the syllogism was perfect.

Piotr also saw and in his churlish boy's heart plotted rare villainies, which happily were not consummated.

It may not have been prudent in one cast for the rôle of Ulysses. But Mark did not try to analyze his pleasure in those weeks and he found no wax for his ears. His heart said, "I am young and life should be bright. But this existence—toil, eat, sleep and toil again—is eating my youth away. I have a right to this little pleasure." So he drifted, reckless of the morrow; he was content to drift. The only real shadow was that cast by Jim Whiting.

The weekly bulletins to Unity contained important omissions.

But if one drifts too carelessly—it is a figure he should have understood—one may be sucked into the rapids.

One night he was in his room, sleepless. There had been no little chat with Kazia after supper. She had had just time to make her simple toilet before Jim Whiting came to carry her away. Mark lay there, tossing restlessly, visioning the two in some secluded spot where Whiting could make love to her undisturbed. The thought was not a sedative. He wished they would come home; he did not like to think of her out in the languorous night with Whiting.

In time they did return. The murmur of their voices on the little front porch came to him through his open window. Whiting seemed in no haste to

leave. Mark wondered impatiently what they found to talk so long about.

At length, sleep as far away as ever, he arose, dressed and went quietly down-stairs—with what intent he hardly knew. On the bottom stair he stopped, facing the door. Whiting was on the point of leaving. Mark saw him coolly put an arm around Kazia; she suffered it. Hot anger—and something far sharper—boiled within the eavesdropper. Nor was it perceptibly cooled when he saw her deftly avoid the kiss Whiting would have taken; she laughed as she broke away. Whiting went down the steps, whistling gaily.

Mark was still standing on the stair when she went in. She started.

“Oh! Is that you?”

“I think it is.”

“That’s a funny thing to say,” she laughed.
“Your voice sounds funny, too.”

He had just been condemning Whiting for the indecent length of his stay. Now he said, “Let’s go out on the porch a while.”

They went out into the moonlight. He sat upon the railing and stared grimly in the direction of Whiting’s departure. It was past midnight; the street slept. From the valley below them came the rumble of the mills that were teaching him fear and self-control. He was silent for a few minutes, while he tried to master the ugly thing within him.

“What is it?” she asked wonderingly.

"Kazia," he blurted out, "you shouldn't let him do that."

"Oh! You saw?"

"I didn't mean to."

"Why do you say I shouldn't?"

"He—he's not fit to touch you."

"He's very jolly and nice to me," she said quietly.
"And—and he wants to take me away."

"But you're not going, are you?" he cried.

She sighed. "I don't know—yet."

He turned from her again. And now his eyes fell upon a vagrant cloud just drifting into the ruddy circle cast up by some blowing converter. He watched it, a vivid opalescent mass in the silver-blue sea, until it sailed out of the glare and resumed its cold ghostly white. Then he spoke.

"But I thought— You've seemed so different, happier, the last few weeks. I thought you'd given up going away."

"Yes, I've been happier. But—do you give up the things you want so easy?"

He was not above impeaching the absent lover's honor. "You know you've got to be sure he wants to marry you."

"I think he does. But," she went on quickly, "you needn't be afraid of *that*. I might want somebody hard enough for that, but not him."

"Could you want anybody that hard?"

"Yes," the words fell slowly, "I think I could."

He laughed nervously. "Kazia, sometimes you look and talk so grown-up!"

"I am grown up," she said gravely.

And she, the unclaimed but waiting waif of the various moods and the one desire, did indeed then seem woman-grown. The white radiance of the night fell full upon her. She was looking past him, past the palely twinkling lights of the hill, across the valley, her eyes softly lustrous, as though she beheld and welcomed the passionate woman's supreme sacrifice to love. He knew then that she was capable of it, that she had been endowed with a genius for loving. He who should win her—He could not complete the thought nor face the picture it summoned. She, her love, seemed beautiful, desirable. He could think but of the moment.

"Kazia!" He did not know how his voice was shaking. "Promise me you won't go away with him."

"Why not?" She turned to him. "Why not?"

"Because," he began unsteadily, "because I want the best for you. Because—because *this!*" With a sudden rough reckless movement he caught her close to him. She suffered him as she had Jim Whiting. "Don't you know I want only the best for you?"

"I think I do." She put a hand to his cheek and turned his face out of the shadow, looking long and searchingly into his eyes.

Then she gave a little sigh. "I promise—now." Her lips waited for his kiss.

Gradually his senses cleared. He began to see the ugly treachery of what he had done. Shame and

desire battled within him. But neither had the victory. His strong clasp slackened.

She seemed to feel, with the sixth sense that was hers, the change in him.

"What is it?" She looked up in quick alarm.

"Nothing." To avoid her eyes he caught her close again, burying his face in her hair, and yielded to the intoxication of her. "Oh! Kazia, Kazia!" . . .

CHAPTER VIII

AFIRE

JULY came, such a month as the city could not remember, humid and sickeningly hot. Children played languidly, always in the shade, and flocked around ice-wagons, quarreling over the division of the fast melting, cool fragments. Passers-by on the streets saluted listlessly, mopped sweltering brows and spoke plaintively of their sufferings. Newspapers daily published long lists of those who had found sudden death. And the thermometer crawled steadily higher.

In the mills the men toiled on, "speeding up" as always to feed a world hunger for steel. They drank vast quantities of water; they salted it that they might drink the more, believing that in much sweating alone lay safety. There were giants in those days. But sometimes they fell. A sudden drying up of sweat, a violent nausea, a sharp blinding pressure upon the brain—in a few minutes or fewer hours they were dead; their names did not always appear in the daily lists. Some that did not die found their strength forever broken.

They whose work carried them before the furnaces suffered torments. One, less strong than his fellows, drove himself before the flames that could

set iron to boiling, believing each day must mark the end for him. Often his comrades, marveling that he could endure, would have lightened his labor by the very little their own tasks permitted. When he snarlingly bade them be about their business, they did not resent; they understood; men's tempers played them strange tricks in that unnatural toil.

The fierce heat blistered his naked sweating skin. The water he drank carried out through his pores the food that should have nourished him. The heavy labor put upon him a weariness sleep could not dispel. The incessant roar, tearing at quivering nerves, impeding thought, became in his overwrought state exquisite torture. Hate, for the mills, for those above who drove so pitilessly, even for the men beside him, filled him; and fear. Once, when Henley, passing, gave his careless nod, he was answered only with a venomous glare that summoned the master's sardonic grin. Mark could have killed him then.

He envied Roman, often almost bitterly. The big Pole felt and showed the effects of the intense heat, but he was the same unflurried philosophical workman as ever, always with a cheerful word; no fear of collapse disturbed him.

Through watching him Mark was beset by a new temptation. When their turns were ended Roman and the men invariably flocked to the nearest saloon and there drank repeatedly—whisky and brandy mostly—until vigor returned to their worn-out bodies. It was a false vigor, Mark knew, and

short-lived. But there were times when the thought of the hour of surcease from fatigue, of spirited outlook, lured him almost irresistibly.

And one evening he followed Roman and his companions to the bar.

"Whisky," he ordered.

Roman put out a restraining hand. "You better not drink," he counseled gravely. "Or only beer."

Mark laughed recklessly and repeated his order. Thrice he drank. The weight dragging at his limbs lifted, the misery rankling in his heart dissolved. He was cheerful, talkative, soon maudlin. Before he reached home the whisky had possessed his unaccustomed brain; he was staggering, drunk. Roman undressed him and put him to bed without supper. But he had had his period of forgetfulness.

The next day he paid—and the craving gnawed more sharply. That evening Roman, understanding, avoided the saloon and led Mark by a straight course homeward. Thereafter it was his custom, until Mark saw the care and forbade.

"You needn't be afraid. It costs too much. Everything," he added with a bitterness for which Roman had not the key, "costs too much."

"Zo? But you are tiredt. Unt you are not strong. Vy do you not leaf the vork?"

"Give up now, after holding on this far! I guess you don't mean that. But some day I'll get where I want—I'll have life by the throat." It did not seem melodramatic to him. "Then I'll make it pay for this—on its knees."

Roman shook his head gravely, as at a blasphemy.

"You shouldt not zay zo. Alvays life iss the master. But you are tiredt."

Mark's indulgence was not repeated, and where stronger men succumbed, he endured, because when the need came he found just will power enough to carry him through. The trial left its mark. The gaunt cracked face set in hard grim lines. The bloodshot eyes became dull and somber. The look of youth—youth itself—vanished.

And in the midst of the ordeal by fire he fought his first battle. At times he was almost grateful for the physical weariness that distracted him from the inner struggle.

He learned then how insensibly Unity had receded into the background. She had become vague, of little substance; she was a story he had read a long time ago. But she was real, too, in that she was a habit. He had constructed of her—how? we need not ask; a youth in love is an artist who can paint the divine, creating what his model lacks—an ideal: fine, pure, of the spirit, dwelling on the heights. He thought he wanted that, loved that, so much that he judged his creation generously, made excuses for glaring inconsistencies. Her coldness, the chilling disappointment of her prim passionless little letters, were but the noble woman's reluctance to reveal the contents of that holy place, her heart. The discontent that had urged him forth to conquest was a romantic desire to see her valiant lover in the victorious estate rightfully his. He was not alarmed,

consciously at least, that he could think of her only as sharing that estate.

There was a memory that accused—a girl, for once warm and yielding, in the last glory of the sunset, clinging to him with the tremulous cry, “You won’t forget me out there?” He had made a vow. . . . Within a twelvemonth he had clasped another.

That other was both real, intensely real—and near. He tried to avoid her; it was not easy. Their eyes would meet across the table; instantly longing would leap. He would come upon her alone in the hall; involuntarily—promises, calculation and other loves forgotten—he would catch her in a rough close embrace. Often no word was said on these chance furtive encounters, but when he went away the bond she wove had been drawn tighter.

Kazia went about, quieter than ever, what she felt too deep for words, too solemn for laughter. She did not again break into song. But no one seeing her eyes could have doubted what had come into her heart. And she gave to her lover with both hands, knowing no thrift in love.

Her happiness awed, sometimes almost frightened her, but she would not question it. When her sixth sense stirred, she shamed it into silence. She saw in her lover’s eyes a trouble that deepened as the days went by, heard it in his voice, felt it when he clasped her. But, hers the trust of Ruth, she laid it to physical strain and would not by so much as a doubting question add to his burden. As she lis-

tened to Roman's tales of her lover's endurance, tenderness multiplied, and humility. She devised little services to add to his comfort and took her reward in service. She watched anxiously for his return and when he came she wanted to weep. She was not grown up, as she had boasted. But in the presence of her great miracle, girlhood was fast ripening into womanhood.

He had only his scanty, furtively won knowledge to interpret their passion.

One evening—the last before the hot wave broke; but he did not know that—he dragged himself homeward, believing he had come to the end of his endurance.

"But I suppose I haven't," he sighed. "Probably I'll just go on and on—but some day I'll drop. I wonder why I do it! I wish the end would come soon—now." He thought he meant that.

Even the bath brought no relief. He sat down to a supper against the very thought of which his stomach revolted. After a few mouthfuls he left the table and went to his room. He threw himself, still dressed, on the bed, tossing restlessly in the vain search for an easy position. His body was one dull ache. The overheated blood pounded through his veins, each throb a knife that hacked his brain. His skin was hot and dry, his mouth parched; fever rose.

The late darkness fell, dispelled a little by the faint glow from a near-by street lamp; it found him lying inert but awake. His mind was beginning to behave queerly, seeing strange shadowy objects

that moved stealthily about. He caught himself muttering to them. He wondered if he were growing delirious, but he could not summon energy to call out or arise.

It must have been ten o'clock when he thought he heard a light tap on the door. He made an effort to speak.

"Come."

The door opened. Some one tiptoed softly to the bedside and leaned over him.

"Are you sick?" came the broken anxious whisper. "You looked so tired—and you came up without—speaking to me. They said, let you sleep. But I've been—so afraid."

He caught her hand and clung to it.

"Would you mind staying a while?" he whispered back. "My head does funny tricks in the dark."

She put her free hand to his hot forehead. Then she gave a low pitying cry. "You *are* sick!—Wait!"

She left the room quietly. Soon she returned with towels and a basin of water in which ice tinkled. She lighted the gas-jet and turned it very low.

"Close your eyes now," she said softly, "and try to sleep. I didn't tell any one, because I wanted to help you myself."

He lay passive, while she placed cold wet towels over his eyes, bathed his hands and wrists in the icy water and stroked his throbbing temples. He wondered dully that hands which worked so hard could be so gentle. For many minutes they did not speak. . . . The stealthy shapes were laid. The sharp

pounding in his brain began to subside. Drowsiness was stealing over him.

His hands groped until they found hers. "Kazia, Kazia!" he breathed.

"Hush!" she said.

"It's such a pretty name," he murmured sleepily.

"But it isn't my real name," came her voice, as from a great distance. "It's Kazimiera, and it means 'trouble-maker.' Only—" There was a catch in the dwindling voice. "Only I must never bring trouble—to you."

He felt her lips on his forehead. After that he slept.

When he awoke the room was dark. A cool moist wind swept strongly in upon him. He heard the rumble of far-away retreating thunder. And with the heat the headache and overpowering fatigue had gone. He drew a long sighing breath. Something stirred in his hand.

Then in the faint reflection of the street lamp he saw the figure crouching on the floor at the bedside, her cheek pillowed in his outstretched hand. It took him a moment to realize what had brought her there.

"Are you awake?" she whispered.

"Yes."

"And better?"

"All right now, thanks to you.—Why, you're all wet!"

"Yes." She rose stiffly to her knees. "It's been

storming and it rained in on me a little. But it's cooler now."

"And you— What time is it?"

"A clock just struck four."

"And you've been here all the time!"

"I was afraid you'd wake up and need some one. And—I wanted to."

He half raised himself to see the better this girl who counted any service as light if done for love, who did not dole out her love as a trader his wares, demanding value received and more, but gave freely, gave all she had. And she had a great deal to give.

"Kazia, why do you do these things for me?"

"It is my place."

Her place! What place, then, had he given her?

"Kazia—" he began.

But more than cowardice sealed his lips. She might have been consciously fighting for her love. She bent over and kissed him.

"Hush! You need to sleep."

There was madness in the very hour. She was very near. The arm that held her strained her even closer, until her cheek rested against his. . . . It was part of her heritage to inflame and to be inflamed.

Suddenly he pushed her away roughly. "Go!" he whispered hoarsely. "Go—now."

She got tremblingly to her feet. "I—" But her voice quivered so that she could not speak.

"Go!" he repeated. "You don't understand."

Because she did understand, she went. He turned his face, fighting his temptation.

There was a quick revulsion.

Across his mind flashed the memory of a boyish passionate quest and the disillusionment. It interpreted the bond that Kazia wove; his blood interpreted. And for this, then, he would have sacrificed the fine pure love, untainted of the flesh, of Unity!

CHAPTER IX

LIQUID IRON

THE hot spell was over.

For fifty-seven years Roman had toiled as few men can toil: on the tiny farm that had been his fathers', to satisfy the greedy tax-gatherer; in Essen, learning another craft under the master Krupp; in the new land whose promise had lured him. Not once had his superb strength and endurance failed him; therefore he had never known fear, had not believed that the fate that overtook others must some day be his. He had been very prodigal of that strength.

But one day—such a one as in that season the steel-workers called cool—he staggered and fell. It was three days before he could go back to his job. During that time Mark Truitt was in charge of the furnace.

He who returned was not the careful, precise, unflurried workman. He knew fear. He tired easily and was uncertain of temper. The heat fretted him and he worried over his work. He lost in efficiency; several times he tapped the furnace either too soon or too late and was sharply reprimanded. To keep up and to forget the new weakness he drank more

whisky than ever. Within two weeks he collapsed again.

It was during Roman's third lay-off that Gracey, the foreman, said to Mark, "It looks like Roman's done for."

"It looks that way," Mark assented.

"It's come pretty sudden with him. It does that sometimes."

"Yes." Mark stared sadly through the furnace mouth at the boiling flame-swept slag. The drama had become a tragedy. There was an element in steel of which chemists took no account—the lives and souls of men.

"He can't expect to keep his job," he heard the foreman continue, "away half the time like this. And last week he spoiled two heats. I'm afraid we'll have to let him go."

"Yes!" Mark's mouth twisted in an ugly sneer. "He's given you the best he had. And now he's breaking down. So—scrap him, of course!"

"That's funny talk," grunted the foreman. "Especially since the superintendent and I've been talking it over and we think of you for the job. That makes it look different, don't it?" he laughed.

"No, it doesn't. Do you suppose I haven't been thinking of that—counting on it—ever since he broke first?" Mark turned hot eyes on the foreman. "Why, that's the worst of you. You drive us to the limit and when we break you kick us off like an old shoe. And that isn't enough. You've got to make beasts of us, every man dogging the fel-

low ahead, glad when he drops and lets go his job. Damn you all, anyhow!"

"Then I'm to tell the superintendent you don't want the job?"

Mark looked again into the boiling furnace, felt its consuming breath, listened to the mills' strident voice. Through every sense he caught their menace; his spirit cowered before it. But he who had come so near to falling could know the bitterness of him through whose fall advancement would come.

"No!" he snarled in savage contempt for himself and his hollow high indignation. "You can tell him I'm a beast like all the rest."

He was on the night turn then. In the morning he went reluctantly to Roman's house. At breakfast he was alone with Kazia. But there was no love-making that morning. Nor did he explain that he was to supersede her uncle at the furnace.

"How's Roman?" he asked with an added inward twinge.

"He's not much better," she sighed. "We're worried about him. He frets because he thinks he might lose his job."

He said nothing.

"Do you think he will?"

"Yes." He made shift to raise his eyes to hers. "I think he will."

"Just because he's sick. Oh, surely not!"

"Because he's used up. And when you're used up, you've got to get out to make room for better—for those that can still be useful."

"Oh, that would break his heart. How I hate those mills!" she cried. "But don't tell him you think that."

"No." His eyes fell. "I won't tell him. He'll find out soon enough."

She had breakfasted long before, but she hovered about, making a pretense of placing dishes within his reach, until she stood at his side. She put out her hand and touched his hair. His head moved restively. The hand fell. For an instant her lips quivered. But she waited until perforce he looked up to her again.

"Will you tell me," she said, "what is the matter?"

"Nothing." He lied ineptly.

"You've been different—since that night. Is it—Is it because you don't want me any more?"

"It isn't that!"

"Is it because you've found you never did really want me?"

"It isn't that."

"I'd rather you'd tell me, if it's so," she persisted bravely. "I hope it isn't so. Sometimes I think I'd die, if it was so. I know I wouldn't, any more than Uncle Roman will die if he loses his job. But I'd want to. Ever since you came—since you—you said you wanted me, things have been so different. I've forgotten everything else. But if you—since that night—"

"Don't!" He dropped his head on his arms. "Oh, Kazia, if you only knew what a beast I am—"

She did not understand. But she saw that he was deeply troubled. She fell to her knees and threw both arms around him, drawing his head close to hers.

"Don't say that! You're not that. And if—if you are, I don't care—I love you so much. Is it because—that night you wanted me—that way? Because I—I don't care for that either. I," her voice sank to a whisper, "I love you so I'm glad when you want me any way."

"What do you know," he cried roughly, "about wanting? Don't you know there isn't anything you want that you can have without hurting somebody? I don't want to hurt you, Kazia—I don't want to hurt anybody. But I—"

He threw off her clasp and rose abruptly.

"There's no use talking. I've thought about it till I'm almost crazy—and I always come back to the same place."

He left her, a little heap on the floor, staring after him with hurt frightened eyes.

He flung himself on his bed. The cup of his misery, he thought, was full.

"Why is it?" he demanded complainingly.

Life was continually presenting to him dramatic issues, complex choices, and exacting for every alternative a heavier price than he was willing to pay. He was very tragic about it. He blamed life, not wholly without cause; himself, perhaps naturally, not at all.

Conscience, sentiment and desire badgered him to

desperation. It ended as might have been expected. "I will take what I want most," he cried, "and let the others go."

Roman did not go back to work until his shift was on day turn again. Some presentiment of the impending calamity must have come to him, for as he and Mark set out for the mills that morning the irritability that had marked him since his first collapse gave way to a deep dejection. It was a silent journey. Sometimes Roman, feeling the sharp fangs of envy, looked covertly at the younger man to whom he had given so freely of his knowledge and who had in lieu of strength something that he, the giant, had not. And Roman was no longer a giant —because he knew it. Out of his muscles had gone the vital force, out of his heart the sustaining courage. He dreaded the cruel labor less only than its loss.

It was not until they were entering the mill shed that Mark said, "Roman, I think Gracey wants to see you." He tried to make it very gentle.

"Zo?" Roman halted, looked intently at Mark. He drew a long whistling breath. "Zo!" He understood. But his presentiment had not told him how deep the hurt would be.

He tried to look the man he had been. But his tired lack-luster eyes belied the stiffly martial shoulders and firm step. He went straight to the foreman.

"Mine chop?" he asked steadily. "You vill take it avay?"

"I'm afraid we'll have to let you go, Roman."

"Unt vy?" There was no complaint.

"You're laying off too much," the foreman answered bluntly. "And you're getting careless in your work. You've lost your grip."

"I haf been zick. Meppy," Roman made an effort to speak the confidence he did not feel, "meppy I'll get better."

"I hope so. You've been a good man in your time. But I don't think so. You're getting too old for the work." Gracey was still young; he could speak carelessly of growing old.

"In my time! Oldt!" Roman repeated slowly.
"I haf not beliefedt zo."

He did not wince. But the shoulders he had been holding so bravely erect sagged. He looked dully past the foreman, along the batteries of furnaces with their crews of young, still sturdy men. He became acutely conscious of the burden that had fastened upon him since his first sickness. He knew now what it was. He had seen it come upon other men, so gradually, so stealthily that they did not perceive it until they crumpled under its weight.

"Oldt! It iss zo."

He started to move away, but the foreman called him back.

"See here, Roman," he said with rough kindness. "You've always drawn good pay. And you've quite a bit laid by, I hear. Why don't you go back to your own country and take it easy the rest of your life?"

Roman eyed him listlessly. "Here iss mine coun-try. But I do not vant to take it easy. Alvays haf I vorkedt—the vork of strong men."

He left the foreman and walked slowly, heavily before the furnaces until he came to his old station. There he stopped, watching the crew at work; in particular watching the figure—so slight for that labor—of the young man who had endured where stronger men fell. How neatly he fitted into his new niche!

"Unt he iss not oldt. *Oldt!*" Roman shivered.

He went closer to the furnace, peering in with naked eyes at the long roaring flames and boiling steel. The torrid breath enveloped him; it seemed a caress. It drew him nearer and nearer, until his aching half-blinded eyes saw only a confused mass of terrible stunning light. A thought stirred, fascinated him: the beautiful cruel steel had eaten up his strength; now let it have the rest of him! . . . His slowly moving feet stumbled. He fell sprawling before the furnace.

Some one raised him. "Roman," said a voice, "I'm sorry."

At first Roman could see nothing. Gradually amid the circle of dancing, stabbing little suns a face began to be outlined dimly, that of the youth who had taken of his knowledge and friendship and then had taken his place. But it seemed to have changed, to have become mocking, evil, the face of the thing that sapped the strength from its servitors and tossed them pitilessly aside.

"Some one had to get your place," the voice went on. "But it seems awful that it's me."

Slowly Roman's vision cleared. The momentary madness lifted. But the ache in eyes and heart continued. And the face, despite its sorrowful mask, remained to Roman the same.

"Here," he answered, "it iss a man must be for himzelf."

He shook off the hand on his shoulder and started aimlessly away, out of the mills.

Mark Truitt ate—or pretended to eat—his supper in the saloon that night. He could not bring himself to face the ordeal of sitting at table with Roman's family.

There was no sense of triumph in his promotion, honestly earned though it was as his world measured such things. Nor yet may we picture him as engaged in theoretic spiritual struggle around the cruelty of which he was the direct beneficiary. He was disposed to criticize, even to resent, but not to revolt. His physical forces were at too low an ebb, mind and heart were too sick from the summer's long battle of conflicting desires, for further inner warfare. He accepted passively, even with a sort of sullen relief, what had come; at least it solved, finally if not for the best, all his problems. What he wanted was a straight road ahead, wherever it might lead.

But he paid his price for rescue from the plight into which desire had dragged him. The memory of Roman's eyes stung him. And Kazia—he had

not known, until the time drew near, what it would cost him to resign her.

He walked to Roman's house, with a firm tread that was the outward expression of his mood. He knew just what was coming. He dreaded it, the moment when he must again face the man by whose fall he profited, must again break the sweet ties this life formed only to sever. Yet he did not flinch. He might rail against the issues presented to him, but at least he had always the courage of his choice.

His way led through the city's heart where a year before he had taken the impression of the greedy remorseless entity. The gathering crowds now were on pleasure bent, as tigerish at play as in pursuit of the right to exist. No one gave a thought to the roughly-clad, not very clean workingman; his kind was a common enough sight on those streets. His neighbors jostled him carelessly and passed on. Fine ladies shrank a little from him, lest he leave upon them some trace of the grime of his toil. But now he did not care. He, like the rest, plowed swiftly along, engrossed in his own problems, his own desires, too intent even to sense an entity.

There was none of the trappings of tragedy in the moment he had dreaded. The family was gathered as usual in the dining-room. Roman had himself in hand once more. He even had added a new quiet dignity; to Mark he seemed bigger than ever before. The *Matka*, inconspicuous as always, sat in her corner, fingers busy with her sewing.

Piotr, though it was vacation time, glowered industriously over his books. Only Kazia, pale and sad-eyed, moving restlessly and uselessly about the room, gave evidence that something out of the routine impended.

Mark stopped in the doorway. For the life of him he could not speak the commonplace salutation on his lips. He saw Kazia steal quietly from the room. But he knew that she stayed within hearing.

It was Roman who broke the silence. "You haf eaten?"

"At the saloon."

"Zo? You shouldt haf come. Ve vaited."

Piotr snarled, "You've got a nerve to come back here at all."

"Piotr," Roman reproved him quietly, "it iss not for you."

"Of course," Mark addressed Roman, "you want me to go. I suppose you blame me. I blame myself somehow—I don't know why. It—it isn't fair! It isn't my fault you've been fired. You ought to see that. And I'd be a fool not to take your job, now that you can't have it any more."

"Huh!" sneered Piotr. "You're glad enough of the chance, too."

"Piotr!" The boy subsided. Roman went on, "It iss not your fault I am oldt, no. But—it iss better you go. You haf mine chop. It iss not goot for me to zee unt hear of the vork of strong men ven I am not strong."

"I will go to-night."

"I haf not zaidt to-night. Ven you haf another goot place to go."

"I will go to-night."

"Well—good-by, then," said Piotr promptly.

Mark waited a moment longer. But there was really nothing more to be said. He went up-stairs.

His carpetbag packed—a brief task—he waited. And this was hard—*hard!* Now there was at least the semblance of a struggle.

Almost it shook him from his resolve. The voice feebly calling upon him to refuse to profit by another's fall grew stronger, imperative. It would be foolish, sentimental, yes! The chance to rise might never come again or, if it should come, must be the same in kind; and the cruelty that cast the broken man aside was not his cruelty. But when he profited by it, it became his cruelty. It seemed then the fine, the nobler course to refuse, to turn his back upon the unholy riot of greedy treacherous mortals scrambling over one another to win that which came to few and made none content. Some part of him, not yet born when he came to the city—that had not been needed until he came where men were many and the most unlovely—yearned to follow that course.

It almost shook him because with that went—Kazia. Instinct, brushing aside the mist of false teachings, interpreted anew and aright the passion he had thought ignoble, warned him to take this whole love while yet there was time.

"Almost thou persuadest me. . . ."

But not altogether. His desire—to survive, to win his place among the masters—still held the whip, kept him facing doggedly his straight road ahead. And, as if jealous of any rival for supremacy over him, it claimed the pale lesser love. He could not see the unlettered Hunky girl sharing that conquest.

When she came, she stood for a moment at the door, a question and a great fear in her eyes.

"I—I was waiting for you," he said.

"I knew. But I couldn't come any sooner."

Her glance fell to the bag, rose again. She walked slowly toward him. He rose. Scarcely an arm's length away, she halted. Suddenly tears stood in her eyes. She put out both hands in a quick pleading gesture.

"Don't go!"

"They don't want me to stay, Kazia."

"That's because you've taken his job. Don't take it!"

He shook his head. "You don't understand. There's no reason why I shouldn't take it."

"He's your friend."

"You don't understand," he repeated wearily. "If I could give him back his job by not taking it, I'd not take it." He believed that then! He began again the old reasoning. "But I couldn't. Some one else would get it—that's all. Isn't it better for me to have it than a stranger? Roman," he concluded bitterly, "ought to see it that way."

"I know there isn't any good *reason*. But—I couldn't go with you, if you took it."

She couldn't go with him! His eyes fell miserably.

"Oh, no!" With one swift step she bridged the space between them, throwing her arms around his neck. "Oh, no! I didn't mean that. I'd go with you, whatever you did. I'd have to. I couldn't stay here, when you're gone—go back to the way it was before you came. I couldn't stand that." A little shudder passed over her.

"Kazia, you're making it harder—" He tried to loosen her clasp.

She clung the closer. "There isn't any good reason. It's because he feels so about it that I care. If you didn't take it, I could go away and leave them and feel right. I could come back and face them and—feel *right*. But if you did, I'd feel—oh, I'm such a stupid I can't say it. But you see, don't you?"

But she gave him no time to answer. "It isn't as if you *needed* his job," she went on breathlessly. "You're so big and strong here"—she pressed a hand against his brow—"they'll have to push you up. And if they don't, we could go some place else. I'd go anywhere—just so it was with you. I wish you'd do that, anyway—take me with you back to the hills you came from, where there are no mills to work the life out of you and people ain't always afraid. But I'd do just as you wanted about that—about everything."

An Arcady that, as her voice and his blood painted it for him. The hills and river—not his hills and river but others, where should be no accusing dissonant memories—and the lazy drifting life with her!

"You can't understand," he cried again. "I've tried—"

"I know. I've seen it troubling you, though I didn't know what it was. But—can't you see? I'm the reason. You'll never find any one that can love you like I can. It's all I know—to love—to love you. I don't ask much. But I can give—everything."

From her eyes, cloudy with love and passion, from the warm, strong, clinging body the intoxication was stealing into his veins, melting his resolution—

With a force that must have hurt her he freed himself from her clasp and sank shaking into the chair, covering his face with his hands. For a breath the scales quivered. Then:

"Kazia," he whispered, "I haven't been square with you. There's—there's another girl—"

"There is— And you—"

After what seemed like a long silence he dared to glance up to see how she had taken it. By then she had crept to the threshold and was looking back at him. About her lips a dazed, foolish little smile was playing. And her eyes were the eyes of one who had just seen a great horror.

When he looked up again, she was gone.

An hour later—how he could not have told—he found himself wandering in the streets, carrying his ancient carpetbag.

CHAPTER X

WOUNDED ON THE FIELD

THE accident was one that happened often. Occasionally, after a tap, water would be turned into the cinder-pit that the cooling slag might harden and be broken without delay. Not seldom the water would be conveyed under the crust, come into contact with the still molten slag and be converted suddenly into steam. Then there would be an explosion. Men might be seriously injured, or even killed, which was very sad—but one of the hazards of the employment. It happened when Mark had been following his straight road ahead for more than five years.

Five years during which he had won success, substantial if not brilliant! The lack of brilliancy might have been disputed by those few who knew that sundry labor-saving devices installed in the Quinby mills during this period were of his invention. If rigid adherence to the routine—toil, eat, sleep and toil again—constitutes brilliancy, this flattering view may be accepted. How little do our private dramas, which seem so tremendous to us, disturb the habits that are our outward life!

It is certain that his fellow boarders—who after-

ward were wont to speak easily of the acquaintance—would as soon have associated him with the idea of a brilliant career as with that of romance. And both ideas were palpably absurd when applied to him—the serious, methodical, unsociable fellow, always carelessly dressed, just one of the young men, indistinguishable among the regiments of their fellows, who had come to the city trusting to the promise it would never fulfil. What could the boarders know of the straight road ahead or of whether it led? His landlady may have had an inkling from the promptness of his payments. Certainly attorneys and real estate agents, who saw him taking toll of the growing city's needs, perhaps could make a guess. And Thomas Henley knew.

As for Mark, he did not swerve; he was never tempted to swerve. If an occasional question obtruded or doubt lurked, when he was allowed to peep behind the scenes of another's drama, it was quickly banished. No dramatic issues of his own were presented, no complex choices. One day was much like another, a narrow, machine-like, exhausting existence, in which in time habit took the place of determination and enthusiasm, and absorption served for happiness.

When Henley heard of the accident he frowned; Henley detested accidents, which spoke of inefficiency somewhere. But when the information was added that the foreman of the open-hearth battery was among the injured, he said, "Damn!" and in person at once called the hospital and his own

physician by telephone and through these agencies commandeered the best surgical skill and care for that valuable workman.

"Remind me," he directed his secretary, "to ask you every morning how Truitt's getting along."

The secretary made a note of it.

"Also look up his antecedents and get in touch with his relatives. And you may send flowers—with my card. I don't quite associate flowers with Truitt, but send them."

The secretary may have been so indiscreet as to look surprised at this interest in a mere foreman.

"The surgical attendance," Henley condescended to explain, "is because he's a valuable man. The flowers are because he almost thrashed me once. I do not," he added, perhaps superfluously, "recommend the example generally. So few would have his discernment to stop at the right point."

The doctors gathered in solemn conclave and did various things to Mark's shattered body. They dogged his steps into the very shadow of death and would not let him die. They did that, knowing they condemned him to a life of pain, and having the security of Thomas Henley's word that their bills should each and every one of them be paid.

While Mark still lingered in the vale of mystery that leads to full knowledge, two men began their daily—and nightly—watches. One was a thin faded man who wore the rusty black of the country preacher. The other was an awkward, gray little man who would sit motionless by the hour, never

taking his eyes from the still form under the white sheet. They said little to each other, asked no annoying questions and kept unobtrusively in the background; even the important doctors could not well have objected to their presence.

There was a night when it was touch and go. Once Simon caught the preacher's knee in a vise-like grip.

"I guess," he whispered, "ye'd better pray."

"I have been praying."

The grip tightened convulsively. "Pray again."

That prayer was as much for Simon as for the injured son.

Mark did not die. His broken body began slowly to mend. He passed out of immediate danger; he was even allowed to talk and to be talked to a little. But in the manner of the nurses, of his visitors from Bethel, even of the calloused doctors, were a grave gentleness, an absence of the exultation to be expected after triumph over death. He felt it.

He put his question to his father. "What are they keeping back from me?"

Simon's glance did not waver, nor did he try to evade with a soothing lie. "Ye'll never walk easy again. Ye'll have to use a crutch, leastways a cane, always."

"It's my hip?"

"Yes."

"Is that all?"

"Ye were hurt innardly. Ye'll have to be careful always. No more work in the mills."

Mark closed his eyes, uttering no complaint. But within was a turmoil of protest and rebellion. A cripple, a partial invalid for life! Half a man! So had ended the dreamed campaign of conquest. He had survived trials under which stronger than he had succumbed, he had doggedly beaten his way to where the going was easy—for this! To be smashed by the forces he was helping to tame to usefulness, perhaps to become a mere spectator of life along with such incompetents as the Courtneys and the Simons. Tears of futile rage seeped out through his closed eyelids.

When the doctor came, confirming Simon's word, he found his patient in a sad frame of mind.

"Why," Mark cried passionately, "did you pull me through for this?"

"Because," said the doctor, "it's my business and I know how."

"I wish you'd let me die!"

"Do you?" The doctor showed little interest in this part of the dialogue. "That's easy. You're still in the woods. Make a genuine effort to sit up and I fancy you'll get your wish."

Mark's fingers clutched at the sheet and his wasted muscles tightened. . . . But he did not make the effort. He could not.

"You see!" The doctor's laugh was half a sneer. "Now quit posing and try to get well."

Mark relaxed, glaring weakly at the sneering doctor. He felt as one in a trap.

He was too weak for sustained strong emotion.

His recovery was slow and very painful; six years of driving ahead at top speed had left him but little reserve vitality for the emergency. The mood of rebellion died down from sheer exhaustion. He accepted his misfortune; but sullenly, with no swelling heroic resolve to defy untoward circumstance.

A great self-pity came upon him as he lay brooding over his mishap. Always physical beauty and perfection had had a strong appeal for him. But he had not known, until it was touched, how intense was the native pride in bodily wholeness; nor how deep that other instinct, repugnance for deformity. He began to measure the limitations of the cripple. Sports and activities in which he had never thought of joining now took on a new tantalizing attraction. He became sensitive in anticipation; he saw in others' eyes the pity that is so closely akin to contempt, their little attentions and aids, courtesies to weakness, not tributes to strength. Daily, through his opened door, he saw a near-by convalescent hobbling painfully on crutches along the corridor. So must he hobble through life. Ah! he had been hardly used!

And he saw the half-concealed satisfaction of the rank of men, formerly his inferiors, who through his fall advanced one step. He winced at that. He hated those men. He saw war from the viewpoint of one who lay wounded on the field.

Yet there was no conscious desire to return to the mills from which he had been banished. They were too much the object of his smoldering re-

sentment just then. He felt toward them as the betrayed toward the traitor. He had lived in and for them, forswearing the indulgences youth craves, the experiments in luxurious pleasure that he in particular craved and had earned. And then, quite as if he were an ordinary workman instead of a talented young man with a fixed destiny, they had broken him and cast him aside.

"I think," he said once to Simon and Richard Courtney, who had not yet left the city, "I'll go back to Bethel."

"It will be a good place to recuperate," said the preacher.

"But I mean to stay."

"We shall be glad to have you back."

Mark caught the note of doubt. "Has Bethel changed?"

"They have cut down the walnut grove back of Squire Martin's, the church has a new roof and there is a lightning rod on the schoolhouse. You would hardly regard them as epochal changes."

"Then why do you think I won't stay."

"Because you have changed."

"Yes!" Mark's bitterness found words. "I have changed—I have been changed. Here." He indicated his body. "I guess I'm just about good enough for Bethel now."

The inference was strong that Bethel was merely a refuge for incompetents. Richard Courtney smiled, a faded pitying smile.

Thoughts of Bethel naturally revived the mem-

ory of Unity Martin. Mark found a certain grim humor in the recollection.

He had had his period of tragic remorse for Kazia. He had not, however, let conscience push to the extreme of disturbing the fixed destiny just mentioned. Nor was he long in attaining a comparative peace of mind in which he could congratulate himself on having avoided a serious blunder. Not many months later he by chance met Piotr, who conveyed the news that Kazia had married Whiting. Piotr's manner of narration implied that, though Whiting was a poor refuge, Kazia had been fortunate to escape Mark. He seemed disappointed that his auditor showed no deep emotion.

Mark's letters to Unity had continued, at erratic intervals. Soon her replies, too, began to dwindle in number and in length; they had never had much to lose in the way of intensity. And then he sent a letter that she failed to answer at all, leaving their love affair suspended, so to speak, in the air. One of Simon's rare and misspelled missives informed Mark that she was, in the phrase Bethel used, keeping company with one Slocum, a prosperous young farmer of the vicinity. This may hardly be regarded as poetic retribution. It caused Mark a few days' surface indignation and a secret relief; one can not feel deeply the loss of a shadow, even though one has paid a price for her.

Kazia married; Unity, having jilted him, keeping company with plodding Bill Slocum! His trag-

edy had ended in sheer farce. We do well, he concluded, not to take our dramas too seriously.

An amazing thing happened one day. There was the sound of a quick unfamiliar tread in the corridor, the door was pushed briskly open and into the room stepped Thomas Henley.

"How are you, Truitt?" he inquired, shaking hands. "I was going by, had a few minutes and ran up to find out for myself."

"Well enough, I guess," Mark replied out of his amazement.

"Good!" said Henley. "Your father, I presume?" He nodded toward Simon.

Mark made the necessary introductions. Simon said, "Pleased to meet ye," and flushed for his son, who had had to own up to the relationship.

Toward the other visitor Henley glanced uncertainly a moment, then held out a hand.

"Ah! Doctor Courtney! Do you happen to remember me?" The question, obviously, was in playful irony.

"I happen to," answered Courtney, who did not share Simon's shyness.

"I remember now, it was you who sent this young man to me. I," said Henley graciously, "am in your debt."

The preacher's shadowy smile appeared. "Is he?" Henley laughed pleasantly. "I fancy he is. And

I have a notion, the debt will grow. I am finishing your job, Doctor Courtney."

He turned to Mark. Simon and Courtney pushed their chairs back from the bedside, that the great man might hold the stage.

"When," Henley asked, "do you expect to come back to us?"

Mark winced and returned to the sullenness that was becoming his habit. "I'm going back—home."

The pause and the slight emphasis on the last word were not lost on Henley; a suspicion as to their import stirred. But:

"Exactly right!" he exclaimed heartily. "Stay as long as necessary to get your strength together. You're too valuable a man to take chances. Your job will wait for you. By the way, about that new charging machine you spoke of before the accident; I suppose the plans aren't where we can lay our hands on them?"

"No," answered Mark, "you can't lay your hands on them. They're in my head."

"An excellent place to keep 'em," Henley agreed. "Suppose then, when you're feeling up to it, I send one of our engineers after you to go over the plans with you? If there's anything in the idea, we ought to install the machines before winter."

"You can send him, if you want to. But I won't go over the plans with him." Mark discouraged the suggestion.

Henley stiffened. "I'm not in the business of stealing inventions."

"I'll see that you don't steal this," Mark responded ungraciously. "Because, when you pay for it, you've got to pay for this, too." He put a hand on the injured hip. "That is, if I ever put the idea in shape."

Henley waved a hand to intimate that allowance must be made for an invalid's humors. "Of course, we expect you to be businesslike. Just what do you mean by that 'if'?"

"I mean I'm through with the mills."

"Who," Henley's glance swept Simon and Richard Courtney sharply, "who has been putting fool ideas into your head?"

"You, for one." Suddenly all the smoldering resentment of the weeks of convalescence burst into flame, against the mills, against life which had outraged him, against this arrogant all-conquering man whom life had let work out his destiny unhindered and whose mere presence in that room revived the now impossible dreams of conquest. For Mark had planned bigly, daringly for the future; as Henley himself would have planned. He quite forgot that he was addressing one whose prerogative it was to be met with meek submissiveness.

"You, for one, when you come here because I'm a valuable man, not because I'm a *man*. Would you come to see me if I hadn't a new invention in mind?"

"Nonsense! You're sick, that's all." Henley smiled kindly but confidently. "I've seen men in your case before. You think you won't come back.

But you will. Why? Because you're a valuable man—I stick to that. You've a genius for mechanics, you know how to handle men and you've got a sense of organization. Most men would think themselves lucky if they had any one of those. What does it mean? That you fit in here, of course. And when a man fits into any kind of life, he can no more keep away than molten steel can avoid the shape of the mold. And—you'll find it so—there's something about *our* business that gets into the bone and blood of a man." He looked at his watch and rose abruptly. "Glad you're getting along. Don't forget, your job is waiting for you."

"But you don't seem to understand," Mark cried. "I'm done for. I'll have to go on a cane, maybe a crutch, all my life. And the doctors say, no hard work at all."

Henley could be very human, when he chose. "Ah!" he said gently. "I had not heard that. I'm sorry. It makes a difference, of course."

It is possible that Henley was not thinking of Mark's commercial value, as he stood looking searchingly down at the querulous patient. He saw a young man whose peculiar fitness for their epic labor had attracted the master, broken now and disheartened, cowering before the thought of a helpless future. Henley could not imagine himself tamely accepting such a fate.

Unexpectedly he leaned forward a little. From his eyes a commanding flash leaped. He put out a hand and caught one of Mark's strongly.

"Your brains don't need a crutch, do they? It isn't brute strength that makes you valuable—we can buy that cheap. You said something about being a man. Now's your chance to be one. What's a little thing like a crutch or a doctor's prohibition? The measure of a man is what he overcomes. Go home and rest, get your nerve together. And when you're ready, let me know. I'll find a place for you."

He was gone. And there was Mark, who had just been weakly if resentfully accepting defeat, a thrill like a war-horse that has heard the bugle call.

The warlike summons dwindled to an echo. He looked up and saw Richard Courtney's faded wistful smile.

"The gospel of a very strong man," sighed the preacher.

"It's easy," cried Mark, "for him to talk. He's a whole man."

"Yes," repeated the preacher, as if to himself, "of a very strong man."

CHAPTER XI

THE MEASURE OF A MAN

WHEN he met Unity again, he had been in Bethel for more than two weeks.

He had started out for the morning turn on his crutches, to test his returning strength, and before he quite realized it the village lay behind him. He swung along for some two hundred yards farther; then let himself carefully down on the roadside.

He sat there for a long time, baring his head to the summer sunshine. To save his life he could not keep up on this morning his pose of melancholy self-pity. Mere existence, even cut to the measure of a cripple's limitations, had its charm, since one could lie on a grassy bank, look up into a cloudless sky or upon the restful green of the hills and catch the strong sweet fragrance of new-mown hay. The mills, the hurly-burly of the city, were far away, an unpleasant restless dream of the night—and this was day! Even the ache in his hip was a negligible matter, since senses were alive again to something besides pain and had so much to play upon. The gusty breezes playfully tossed a little cloud of dust over him. He laughed.

"This is very good indeed!" It would have been

almost flawless but for one thing: he was rather lonely; he felt the need for some one to share the day with him.

He had his wish. Down the valley road appeared a buggy drawn by a lazy heavy-footed horse of the sort distinguished as "safe for women". From within the buggy Mark caught the gleam of a white shirt-waist and a sailor hat. Even before the vehicle drew near enough for recognition, he knew the passenger for Unity.

A slight tremor passed over him. To meet the embodiment of a shadow by whom one has been jilted—or whom one has jilted?—is at least mildly exciting.

A slight tightening of the reins was sufficient to stop that horse.

"Hello, Unity!" Mark felt that this greeting fell short of the dramatic proprieties.

"Oh! How do you do?" she answered colorlessly.

There was a moment of silence during which, without seeming to do so, they inspected each other.

Mark had a twinge of disappointment. This was not the Unity he had loved so boyishly—and so briefly. She was as pretty as ever, in a way even prettier; but one could hardly have thought of her as spirituelle. Her face was fuller, its color deeper, and there was a healthy roundness in the line of shoulder and breast, of the ankle that protruded from under the dust-robe. Not that she was fat! But her daintiness was gone. Mark could not quite

define the lack, but even he could see that she had passed from under the influence of the *Ladies' Home Journal*; in the item of dress she would have suffered from comparison with the young ladies of his boarding-house. Her hair was done carelessly. And vivacity had gone the way of daintiness. She had the air of having settled into the habit of Bethel, of having accepted its narrow outlook. A faint vertical line between her eyes hinted that she might not have accepted it with complacency.

Therefore he said, "You look the same as ever, Unity."

She brightened a little. "You think so?" There was something almost pitiful to him in the way she caught at the remark. She became spiritless again. "But, of course, that isn't true."

"But, of course, it is."

She laughed unpleasantly. "You wouldn't think so, if you saw the way they treat me here now."

"The men? Surely not!"

She shrugged her shoulders. "No. The women. They're *so* friendly now and they don't giggle behind my back. And when they haven't anything else to gossip about, they talk about how I'm settling into an old maid."

"Isn't that what the rhetorics used to call hyperbole. It should be sparingly used. Besides I hear you have a beau."

"Oh! him!" With another shrug. "He's afraid I'm not a good cook."

"That's a nice way to talk about a lover! Es-

pecially," he laughed self-consciously, "since you threw me over for him."

He almost missed the acid look she flashed at him.
"It broke your heart, of course!"

"I've had pleasanter experiences," he said dryly.
"Why didn't you answer my last letter, Unity?"

Her indifference might have been a little too well done. "For one thing, even I have a little pride. It was easy to see you'd got tired of me. Not that I cared! Those boy-and-girl affairs always die a natural death. There was another girl, wasn't there?"

"Why, I believe so. In fact, there was. I gave her up for you."

"And I gave you up. You must have thought," again her unpleasant laugh rang, "you'd made a poor bargain all round. Or had a lucky escape?"

"I did," he answered grimly, leaving her to construe the answer as she chose.

"That's an easy conundrum." She gathered up the reins. "Well, I must be going. We're harvesting now and I have to get back in time to help get dinner. Good-by."

She drove on, as casually as if they had been neighbors in the habit of meeting daily. . . . And this was their meeting after six years.

He leaned back on his grassy bank, having found, if not a companion, at least food for reflection. The brief commonplace meeting had left him vaguely uneasy. That disappointing change in Unity—he supposed he was in a sense responsible

for it. He did not say, "This woman is repining because she has lost me, once her lover." Overweening confidence in his sex attractiveness was not the form his vanity took; also, he was less credulous than of yore, and he suspected that Unity was not one to let the loss of a mere love devastate her life. But he remembered how eager she had been to leave Bethel. And he, who was to have been her path-finder to that brilliant community known as "the world", had failed her. Who better than he, he somewhat plaintively inquired, knew the bitterness of a shattered dream? Perhaps the farcical denouement of his triangular romance had not been so humorous, after all. Perhaps he had not been quite fair to Unity.

There was a vague but strong sense of loss—his own—in the change in her. He had ceased to love her, he had almost forgotten her. But once upon a time he had constructed of her an ideal; his faithlessness had not followed conscious disillusionment. The artist—even the lover-artist—sees with a pang his fine creation sink back into the form and faultiness of his earthy model.

He was still resting on his grassy bank when, an hour later, the slow-going vehicle reappeared. With difficulty—for he had not yet become expert with his crutches—he rose and stood in the middle of the road. The horse, without urging, stopped with its nose against him. A more skilled observer than Mark might have noticed that some villager's mirror and comb had been utilized to the advantage of

Unity's hair and that her hat had been readjusted to its most becoming angle; and would have drawn certain inferences.

Mark did not. He merely smiled at her over the horse's head.

She seemed rather impatient with his obstructiveness. "You've bought the pike, then? I hadn't heard."

He laughed and waved his hand airily. "This morning the world is mine. Do you know, we haven't shaken hands?"

"Oh, haven't we?" Her tone attached no importance to the omission.

Nevertheless, when he stood aside, she drove the horse forward a length and laid a limp hand in Mark's.

"Also," he continued, "you haven't said you're sorry that I was hurt."

"Oh!" she repeated, with perfunctoriness unrelied, "I'm sorry."

He laughed again. "You needn't mind now. You'll have plenty of chances before long."

"Meaning?"

"The road to your house is still open to the public, isn't it? I'm thinking of buying a new horse. Unity," he returned to gravity, "there isn't any reason why we shouldn't be good friends, is there?"

"People will talk."

He paraphrased a classic formula. "Unity," he said earnestly, "drat the people!"

"You can say that. *You* don't have to stay here."

"But I'm going to stay here."

"Not for good?"

"For good."

"Why?"

Mark laughed shortly. "When you're put out of the race, you don't want to stay where you have to watch the others still running."

She inspected him again, more closely. He thought he was sincere. But he did not know that despite the crutches and his drawn white face he had not the resigned dispirited air of the man who has accepted a permanent seat on the shelf. The ascetic years had etched upon his countenance evidences of growth. Success had given him self-reliance. Endurance had written of courage. Much close thinking on the problems of his work had left the unmistakable sign of an active penetrative mentality. Her intuition plumbbed deeper than his invalid's mood.

"Look as long as you want to," he suggested at last. "In the meantime—will you set the dogs on me when I drive down your way?"

"Oh, well!" She tried unsuccessfully to return to indifference. "If you really want to come—! It's been a dull season. I suppose it would be a mercy to the gossips to give their tongues a chance to clack once more." She drew the reins taut.

"A real philanthropy," he assented, grinning, as the horse lumberingly resumed its journey.

Mark swung slowly along homeward. He smiled pityingly. He had read aright the new interest in

Unity's face: that of the condemned prisoner who has heard rumor of reprieve. He was sorry for her. And pity—we have it from the poets—is love's poor relation.

Mark regained a measure of strength. He discarded one crutch and began each day to take a few steps experimentally with no support but a cane. He became the notable figure of the village, greeted with that mingled awe and curiosity that are the meed of the soldier home wounded from the wars. He spent many beautiful idle hours, alone or with Richard Courtney, driving his new horse among the hills. It did not occur to him that his avid pleasure in their freshness and fragrance, their hushed whisperings, their play of light and shadow, was not the pleasure a man takes in a permanent environment. But, though Mark came to regard his lot with constantly lessening self-pity, the preacher thought he detected signs of an incipient restlessness.

Sometimes—often—Unity was with him on these drives. Tongues clacked according to prophecy. But Mark did not care. And Unity did not care. She even, in brazen defiance of public opinion that almost brought upon the gossips the calamity of speechlessness, returned to her allegiance to, and study of, ladies' magazines. By arts for which she had some skill she extracted from the well defended pocket of Squire Martin the sum of fifty dollars, and thus enriched, made a journey to Concord. The potentialities of fifty dollars would be believed by none save other prisoners who have heard rumor of

reprieve. The results, before Bethel, convicted the squire of a more flagrant folly than that he had committed.

Mark fell placidly and easily in love with Unity again. At least, the while protesting, he decided that it must be love.

But the protest was half-hearted. He wanted to love. He needed, he assured himself, love to fill the void created by loss of activity. Moreover, although he had come near enough to success to salt its tail, his years were but twenty-six, an age when love seems beautiful, all pleasurable, alluring; and this despite the still small voice of experience.

"Are ye goin' to stay here in Bethel?" Simon broke a long silence to inquire, one rainy evening.

"I don't know," Mark answered out of a brown study, off his guard. But he added quickly, "Yes, I do know. I'm going to stay."

"Then, what are ye goin' to *do*?"

"I don't need to do anything. I've got twenty thousand dollars. That'll last me—in Bethel."

Simon shook his head gravely. "Ye can't stand that. Ye've got to do somethin'. An' there's nuthin' to do here—yet."

"And never will be."

"Mebby not. All the more reason why that Mister Henley's right."

"Would you have me go back to the city?"

"Yes."

"You don't know what you're saying," Mark began irritably. "I could never take a pen pusher's

job. The mills are all I know. And that life—you don't know it. It costs too much. It takes it out of you, drives you like a slave. It—I'm not fit for it now. It—oh, let's not talk about it." He got up from his chair and began to limp restlessly around the room, peering impatiently out of the windows. "I wish this confounded rain would let up!"

But Simon had more than one of Mark's problems on his mind.

"Are ye," he went on, "goin' to marry Unity Martin?"

"I don't know. I suppose so."

"If ye don't find out purty soon," remarked Simon most surprisingly, "she'll do your knowin' fur ye. I wouldn't."

Mark stopped at a window, looking frowningly out at the sheets of rain that dashed across the square of light.

Simon must have felt deeply on the subject, for he repeated, "I wouldn't."

"No," said Mark testily, "I suppose you wouldn't. I don't know. But if I do it, it will be with my eyes open." Which seems a most unloverlike saying.

But he did know. He had not lost the habit of Joseph. Out at the farthermost limit of the lamp's reflection, just where it merged into the dense blackness of the storm, he beheld a shadowy vision that laid all doubts: a woman pleasing to the eye, no heady wine to sweep a man from his feet nor yet a cold spirit-like ideal to be worshiped from ridicu-

lous postures, but maturely companionable, comfortably faulty and with her subtle appeal to the senses. Critically, protestingly, but indubitably, he hungered for her.

He heard a step behind him and turned. His father was at his side, looking out of the window. Mark remembered: it was the south window. Then he, too, saw Simon's vision, his own blotted out. Not as he had seen it on the night before he set out to explore his uncharted Eldorado, but with the fulness of one who has known—the black sky weirdly alight, the air heavy with thick sulphurous smoke, the great sheds housing the intricate unerring mechanism, the roar and hiss of elements in mêlée, the sweating half-naked figures toiling before sun-bright furnaces or in the glow of incandescent ingots. . . . He saw it all in its dramatic splendor and he thrilled again. Simon's dream seemed real then, possible.

He turned away quickly. "It *isn't* possible," he cried. "You're mad to keep thinking of it. And if it was—"

"Ye seen it, too, then?"

"Oh, it's great to look at and think of, but it's hell to be in."

"It'll come." Simon spoke in the calm of a great faith.

"You don't know what you see. And, if it was possible, it would be a crime to bring that hell into these hills."

"Ye can't cry it down. Ye've seen it. Ye'll

never forget it. It's like what Mr. Henley said—it gets into the bone and blood of a man. An' it won't pass out. An' I've only seen it out *there*. But ye've seen it *real*. That's why ye can't stay here. I wouldn't want ye should. Good night."

Mark did not know that Simon had left. He stood long at the window, trying to conquer the thrill. And he could not. . . . A voice rang insistently, "The measure of a man is what he overcomes."

But a stronger if less subtle magic than mere visions was at work.

There was an evening when he was alone with Unity on Squire Martin's front porch. It was one of the soft languorous nights that sometimes come to Bethel in early September. On the air lingered the sweet heavy perfume of moonflowers. Around them rose the many little voices of the night. He sat below her, in sensuous enjoyment of the hour, looking up at her. Especially, looking up at her. She sat on the top step, leaning negligently against a porch pillar, her face turned toward the hills. They talked little and that in low tones.

Once he leaned toward her. He had to peer closely to make out her look of content.

"Do you know," he remarked, "you ought to be glad I came back?"

"Indeed! And why?"

"Have you looked in the mirror lately? When I first came you looked—well, cranky and as though you didn't care whether school kept or not."

"Well, of all the conceit! I suppose you take all the credit." Thus she admitted certain improvements.

"And why not?" he laughed lazily. "When you come right down to it, Unity, you never really, definitely threw me over."

"It isn't too late."

"Yes, it is too late."

She said nothing. But when he reached up to take her hand he found it a tightly clenched little ball.

"Evidence of strong emotion!" he laughed again. He forced it open and carried it, soft palm upward, to his lips.

"You're so foolish!" she said.

"They do that in books," he explained. "I wanted to see what it is like. I find I like it." He repeated the performance.

"You're so—"

"You said that before," he interrupted. "Unity, do you remember the drive we took that Sunday before I went to the city?"

"I think I do."

"She thinks she does!" he apostrophized the night. "I have a scheme. To-morrow, right after dinner, I'm going to drive down here for you. Unity, let's have that Sunday over again—in every particular."

Again she was silent.

"You don't agree?"

"I—I'm not sure."

"That you love me?"

She shook her head. "That I want to marry you."

"Is it," he shrank back a little from her, "because of this?" He touched his cane.

"No, of course not. I think you make too much of that."

"Is it money? You needn't worry about that. Why, we'll be rich—for Bethel."

"I'm sure of that—for Bethel. But it isn't that. I'm not sure," she sighed, "that you love me enough."

He laughed riotously at the absurd notion. "Why, Unity, if you only knew—! What can I say to prove it?"

"Saying things doesn't prove them, does it?"

"Then what can I do?"

"I don't know." She sighed again very plaintively. As if she did not know exactly!

But when he drew her down and kissed her, she did not resist. "Wait," he whispered fatuously, "until to-morrow. Then you will be convinced." Although what virtue the morrow would hold he did not say. He probably did not guess.

Unity did not scruple to change the current of another's life; she saw no occasion for scruples. She, too, felt youth's blind impulse to wed, the enchantment of sex mystery. She thought she loved Mark. But she did not believe his expressed resolve to stay

in Bethel was, could be, genuine; or, if genuine, that its execution would be good for him. And, principally—she knew exactly what she wanted.

But there were no outward signs of this certitude as, all in white for their holiday from the crown of her lingerie hat—of which she, alone of all Bethel, knew the name—to the tip of her canvas slippers, she came down the steps the next day to meet her waiting cavalier. Seeing her, he said to himself, "She is a woman now. She knows what love means and she is afraid—of it and of me. I must be very careful not to frighten her. I must be very tender." So—very craftily, as he thought—he restrained his love-making to an occasional incidental demonstration. At the same time her reserve goaded his interest; which was as she had hoped.

They took much the same road they had taken seven years before. They chatted in lighter vein, with intervals of eloquent silence. The shadows lengthened. His senses warmed; the headiness of this wine was doubtful only to him who drank. The game she was playing excited her; reserve, not wholly by design, melted a little. On a hilltop whence they could see only other hills and the sinking sun they ate the lunch put up by the thoughtful Susan. Then they waited to watch the sunset.

"Unity, what must I do to convince you?"

"Nothing," she murmured.

He considered his happiness.

And after a while she said, "Tell me about your life in the city. You've never said much about it."

Innocent demand! Not in vain is the trap set in the sight of a young man in love. He began to describe the mills to her. And as he went on, into his words crept the unconscious eloquence of a real enthusiasm. His face became eager. Before he had ended, he was on his feet declaiming to her, who was a very attentive audience. He saw what he described.

"Ah!" she breathed, as he reached a period.
"What a life! And you could leave it!"

"You forget," he reminded her. "I was put out of it. And there's another side to it."

"Is it really true that you couldn't go back?"

"The doctors say so. Though Henley doesn't."

"What does he say?"

"He says, 'What's a doctor's prohibition?' And that if I go back he'll make use of me. Sometimes I wish he hadn't said that."

She watched him closely. He was frowning at the sunset, which they both had forgotten. His right hand gripped the cane so tightly that the knuckles showed white.

She leaned forward suddenly, resting her hand on the one that held the cane. "Mark, why don't you go back to it?"

He jerked his hand free, as if he had felt a twinge of pain. "Don't suggest that, Unity!" he cried. "There's that other side. It's hard and cruel and narrowing. It eats up all the best of you. Sometimes it kills you. It makes you a machine, not your own man. I used to feel it when I was

there, sometimes terribly. Here I see it from a distance and I understand better. It's just one hellish scramble, that life—" He stopped abruptly, with an impatient gesture.

"I don't understand—"

"Of course you don't. You've got to be in it and then come away, to understand. But you can understand this. The work's an awful grind. It—in any job—is the work of a whole man, of a strong man. I could barely keep up to it, before the accident, by giving up everything else. Now I'm not a whole man. I couldn't stand it."

"But you could *try*. And you would have me to lean on—now." Unity, too, had read her books.

But he did not laugh. "The work would leave nothing of me for you. You wouldn't want that, would you?"

"That's just an excuse, I think." A little smile edged her lips; from it he read disappointment in him. "I didn't think you could be *afraid* of anything."

It was a crude weapon, but it went home. For a moment he looked angry protest at her. Then he wheeled sharply and limped to the brow of the hill. He stood there for many minutes, his face to the sinking sun.

Afraid. He had not thought of that. Were then his revolt, his righteous criticisms of the "scramble" but the disguise of cowardice? The cowardice of the man who can endure all bravely until the tide of battle turns against him, and then flees in panic?

His hot cheeks condemned him. . . . "The measure of a man is what he overcomes."

The sun went down, its glory unseen by the man on the hilltop. He turned and went back to Unity. He looked at her keenly, sternly.

"Do you make this a condition?"

There was a quality in his voice she had never heard before. It frightened her. Her eyes fell from his. Not calculation, but fear—of losing him altogether—gave her a right answer.

"Oh, no, no! It's for you to say. It's only that I want you to—to be where you belong—dear."

She dared not raise her eyes. But after a long silence came his troubled answer.

"If I go back, Unity, you won't—?"

But how could he phrase his fear or interpret the hot surging that drowned it?

She sighed happily.

He was soon to learn.

A man and a woman entered into the most trying of human relations. Both were young, but both had hardened in the pursuit of selfish desire. Neither had the love that finds its chief joy in yielding. Nor could mere sensuality weld them into one. Where no real union could be, there one must bow to the 'other. For that one the relation must become bondage, chafing, stultifying, still further hardening.

But it had, too, its other side of the ledger, for it poisoned the whole draft of the life he had chosen, kept alive the discontent that dreamed always of something better beyond.

CHAPTER XII

'A MAN AND HIS WIFE

IN THE down-town offices of the Quinby company and in the particular room which may be called the headquarters of the Quinby army, two men were sitting late one winter afternoon. The one was Henley himself, now chairman of the company, a bit stouter than when we first met him twelve years ago, his arrogance a little less evident in manner albeit time had not altered the fact. The other was a youngish man whose thin bony face and hands and streaks of premature gray hair spoke of physical frailty. No one, however, having noticed the dark eyes, by contrast with his unhealthy pallor almost feverishly bright and active, and the thin line of the mouth, would have dismissed him as one of life's negligibles.

It was common knowledge in the Quinby company that no one was more welcome in Henley's office than the young superintendent whom the master's influence had put in command of the big new open-hearth plant. It was even suspected that Henley had taken Truitt in with him in his speculations. (The name is a misnomer. Henley's speculations partook of the certainty of investments.) This was matter for jealousy among the other superinten-

ents, although Truitt's fitness for his new position was grudgingly admitted by all.

At the end of a long discussion of company affairs Henley pressed a button. His secretary appeared from the adjoining office.

"Bring in the Light and Heat account."

The secretary went out. Henley produced a box of cigars, chose one and lighted it. As an afterthought, he held out the box to Mark.

Mark sniffed the fragrant smoke hungrily. "No, thanks."

"Don't smoke, eh?"

"Yes. Just one, after dinner."

"Why the one?"

"To console appetite, I guess."

"You have appetites, then?"

Mark grinned wryly. "All of 'em."

Henley smiled slightly. His superintendent's rigid abstemiousness was well known to him, but it was his pleasure to play the rôle of tempter. It was equally his pleasure to play it in vain.

The secretary returned with the account of the latest successful speculation. Henley gave it a rapid glance and handed it to Mark. The latter studied it carefully, questioned certain items, questioned the explanation and finally accepted them. Henley smiled again. He knew men who would have hesitated to question his accounts. Everything he knew of Truitt he liked.

"Make out Mr. Truitt's check," he directed the secretary, who withdrew and promptly returned.

Henley signed the check and delivered it to Mark. The latter receipted the accompanying voucher.

"I've another thing in mind," Henley suggested. "Care to go in?"

Mark hesitated, his brow suddenly wrinkling. "I think not," he said at last. The note of irritation did not escape Henley. "I've my eye on a new house."

"I thought you were pretty comfortably fixed."

Mark shrugged his shoulders. "It seems the neighborhood leaves something to be desired."

"Yes? I see," Henley indicated Mark's heavy furred overcoat, "you're driving out. You can take me home—unless you're in a hurry to reach that delinquent neighborhood?"

A quarter of an hour later the two men emerged from the corridor of the Quinby building. At the door a crippled beggar accosted them. Henley ignored him. Mark slyly gave him a coin.

A beautifully matched team of blacks harnessed to a light sleigh awaited him. Evidently Mark had not forgotten his early knowledge of horse-flesh. Only a man whom fortune had kissed could have afforded such horses. For Mark—with his "leg and a half"—they were hardly an extravagance, almost a necessity.

There had been a snow, hard-packed by traffic, and the blacks caught the sleigh swiftly along through the dusk. When the crowded business section lay behind them, Henley remarked casually:

"I saw your little charity back there."

"He was a cripple."

"I see," Henley nodded. "That's your greatest asset."

"What is?"

"Your health."

"My lack of it, you mean," Mark answered grimly. "But I don't quite get your point of view."

"It keeps you from making a fool of yourself. There's Hare, for instance, a capable man, drinking himself into incompetency. And Harmon, with his women. For them prosperity means indulgence. You keep your appetites under control."

"I have to."

"Exactly my point." For a few blocks Henley apparently gave himself over wholly to the agreeable exercise of breathing in the keen frosty air. When he resumed, no one could have guessed from his tone that he was working toward a given point.

"Higsbee's case is worse. One woman."

"Has he—"

"His wife. A smooth catty creature, with a craze for display. Married him after he made his stake, of course. Always nagging him for new jewels, new carriages, a new—house. Makes him dress for dinner. Drags him around to dances and receptions and box parties—when thirty minutes of that takes it out of him more than twelve hours at the rolls used to." Mark might have been sitting for his portrait. "Egging him on until he's scheming as unscrupulously as a toothless old dowager to get into society—or what with her passes for so-

society. He spent six months beating about the bush to get me to send my wife around to call on her. Queer, how a big talented man will let a pretty useless woman pull him around by the ears!"

"Damned queer!" said Mark.

"I suppose we, who aren't in the same case, can't understand it."

Henley, Mark thought, seemed to understand it very well.

A few minutes more brought them dashing up to a stop under the porte-cochère of Henley's big house.

"Much obliged for the lift," said Henley as he sprang out of the sleigh. He added casually, "Er—by the way, I think I heard my wife say she was planning to call on Mrs. Truitt in the near future."

Despite a quick flush, Mark looked at him steadily. "Higsbee, then, was a parable?"

"By no means," Henley returned blandly. "It seems they have met at St. Swithin's and were—mutually interested." He paused, but as no reply came from Mark, continued in the impersonal tone of one who philosophizes generally. "After all, there's a Higsbee in all of us. We affect to jeer at this society thing. But we want our wives to have the best. It's more comfortable, too. And besides, when a man has a charming wife, he can't hide her light under a bushel. Good night."

"Good night. Especially," Mark muttered to himself, "when she proposes to let it shine." He gave the reins an angry jerk. The horses leaped and

raced down the driveway and into the street. The music of the sleigh-bells rang merrily on the keen air. The pace was one to exhilarate, to clear the mind, to fill the heart with the sheer joy of living. Passing pedestrians looked enviously after him.

Once he laughed aloud, sneeringly. "Complaisant toady!" He did not refer to Henley. He had, in fact, himself in mind. One can not well openly resent the insolent if friendly interest—even in one's domestic affairs—of the man whose eccentric favor spells prosperity. Still it stings, especially when it argues a shrewd guess as to the fact. And the fact was, Superintendent Truitt's domestic estate, like the neighborhood in which he lived, left something to be desired.

He had reached that neighborhood, a pleasant substantial community, within easy envying distance of the gilded colony of which Henley's big house was the geographical and social center. The streets were comfortably wide and lined with sapling maples, their meagerness just then unrelieved in the winter nakedness. It is true the houses—of that distinct class known as "contractor's houses"—were not small, unless one drew a comparison, but they were of an uninspired plainness and as like as so many peas. Yet, when they moved into this neighborhood, the Truitts had been somewhat in awe of it. "What," out of their slender sophistication they had asked, "could one desire more?" And even on that winter evening, after two years, Mark desired nothing better. But then, as his wife some-

times remarked to him, Truitt had many plebeian tastes.

He stopped at a brick house that differed from its neighbors only in that the lot was wide enough to allow for a driveway to the little stable in the rear. A groom, who had come to the front in answer to the summons of the bells, took the team.

Mark, leaning hard on his cane, limped stiffly up the terrace steps to the porch. The parlor—Unity was beginning to refer to it, not easily, as the drawing-room—was lighted, the shades were not drawn. He peered in.

He saw a room in nowise distinctive. Glistening mahogany furniture, which time had had no chance to mellow, filled it to overflowing. A grand piano, never played but open and with a sheet of music on the rack, imposingly occupied one corner. In another corner stood a small bookcase, its books in sets, as brightly red as when they came from the bookseller. No man would have been so foolhardy as to rest an elbow on the crowded mantle. Upon the walls hung a strange medley of pictures, prints and photographs, oils and water sketches—of no virtue whatsoever—grouped haphazard. With Unity a new purchase was an addition, not a substitution.

The critic, however, would have resigned his function when he beheld the woman upon whom Mark gazed through the window. She was reclining in graceful attitude—Unity could be relied upon to present graceful poses at all times—in a big

easy chair. Her gown, of some soft, pale green stuff, vastly became her and, as did every detail of her from the carefully achieved coiffure to the black velvet slippers that peeped out from beneath her skirt, avouched the fact that Unity had mastered more than the rudiments of the art of personal decoration. She made an almost flawless lovely picture, you would have said; since she was more than merely pretty and a trifle less than beautiful people were apt to compromise on "lovely" when speaking of Unity Truitt. But Mark, who had collaborated in an essential capacity to produce this charming picture, smiled satirically. The smile was at himself and because upon seeing her he had known an impulse of admiration and tenderness: an absurd impulse in a man who by reason of her had just heard a parable and swallowed his pride.

He went into the house, doffed his heavy overcoat and limped into the drawing-room. Unity did not by so much as a glance around disturb her graceful pose until he was at her side. Then she languidly held up a hand to him.

He brushed it with his lips. "You're looking scrumptious, Unity." He went so far as to give a brief admiring pat to her hair.

She moved petulantly. "Don't! You'll muss my hair."

He dropped her hand. "That would be a shame, wouldn't it?"

He sat down near her. She sighed. The sigh, one might have thought, was one of alarm and was

because she had noted his pallor, which even after the spirited drive was so pronounced.

"Been a hard day?" But the question was not Unity's. She had not marked his air of exhaustion or, if she had, was so used to it that she was not concerned.

"So hard!" She sighed again very plaintively. "So very exciting! And you know how excitement always affects me."

"Yes, I know." Just the edges of his satirical smile showed again. "What has been the particular excitement to-day?"

"Mrs. Henley called!"

"Yes?" Mark's voice did not reveal the interest so epochal an event demanded.

"Yes?" mimicked Unity. "Is that all you can say? But I suppose, of course, you don't care, though you know what it means to me."

"Just what does it mean to you, Unity?"

"It means," somewhat dithyrambically, "that I have won the friendship I have tried so hard for three years to win."

"Then she came up to the plans and specifications?"

"She's a dear. So sweet and refined! So intelligent and ambitious! It's no wonder a man with such a wife has got as far as Mr. Henley has. Though I suppose *he* would never give her credit."

"I fancy Henley does her justice," Mark ventured.

"That is more," Unity's tone was one of patient

dignified reproach, "than some people I know do for *their* wives."

Habit put a seal on his lips.

From lesser beginnings the Truitts had found, in the earlier years of their marriage, steel and tinder for quarrels: nasty quarrels in which tempers were lost and cutting words spoken and that invariably had the same issue—the husband, humiliated by the sordidness of it, suing for peace. But that stage had passed. Now, at the first sign of hostilities, he promptly hung out a white flag. He was willing, with the never worded thought that when a man has made a bad bargain the least he can do is to stand by it, to buy peace at whatever price her desire or whim demanded. A fact of which even an unintelligent woman could not remain in ignorance.

He was, that evening, at a low ebb physically, his hip ached severely, and despite Henley's insolent parable he had less inclination than usual for domestic bickering. He leaned back in his chair, closing his eyes, and relaxed his tired body. She interpreted this listless attitude as evidence that he was in a docile frame of mind.

She eyed him covertly for a little. "I was so ashamed this afternoon," she murmured at last pathetically.

He opened his eyes with a start; he had almost slept. "Ashamed—? Oh, yes—Mrs. Henley. What did you do?"

"I did nothing. It was this house. I could see her looking around at all this and trying to hide her

amusement over it. Though she was careful not to take *too* much pains to hide it."

"But, for a friend, isn't that—"

"Oh, you can't understand. Or won't," she amended bitterly. "You've no conception of the pride a woman likes to have in her home. Of course, she looked down on this. Anybody would."

"We used to think it mighty fine. In Bethel we never dreamed of anything so good."

"You didn't. But I did," she retorted. "Besides, we aren't in Bethel now. We're here and growing rich. And we ought to live like the rest of our kind."

"Just what is our kind, Unity?"

"If you didn't have me to give you ambition, we'd still be homely dowdy nobodies."

"Then we are somebodies?"

"We can be. We're going to be." She sat up suddenly, her thin lips tightening. "Mark, we must—we simply must—move. We can afford it, I know."

"Yes, we can do it." He made a gesture of resignation. "But it will clean me out of ready cash."

"You can make more," said Unity negligently. "You're so clever at that. And besides, what's the use of having money if it doesn't buy the things we want?"

"For one thing," he smiled grimly, "I can't get insurance, and men have been known to die and leave their widows penniless. However," he rose

with an evident effort, "we've gone over all this a hundred times. I'll see."

Yielding was in his voice.

She fell back into her languid graceful pose. She gave him her very sweetest smile, which she meant to seem lovingly grateful. He saw in it only triumph.

"You can be such a dear!" she purred. "I'm so proud of you! And now you'd better hurry and dress. You know the Higsbees are coming for dinner."

He repressed an oath. "I'd forgotten." And he limped heavily from the room.

In his own room he dropped on the bed, yielding for a brief interval to the pain and weakness of which it was his pride never to give a sign before others. He had learned that a doctor's prohibition is not always to be defied with impunity. Pain and weakness, if not always with him as on that evening, yet were his daily portion. . . . Under this handicap he had driven himself to the outer edge of the circle of light cast by such luminaries as the Henleys.

He allowed himself but a few minutes' respite. Then he rose and began the toilet upon which his wife laid so much stress; to Unity "dressing for dinner" symbolized both their advance toward, and fitness for, membership in the flamboyant—it is not the word she used—circle. This task complete, the slight satirical smile that was becoming habit with

him appeared again. And again it was at himself, because he rather fancied the striking image in the glass—the slender figure in black and white, surmounted by the pale angular face with the stern mouth and brilliant eyes. He even thought that, when it wore that smile, it bore a faint likeness to Henley himself.

The smile deepened. "This is sheer vanity." The thought pleased nevertheless.

He descended barely in time to join Unity in greeting their guests.

He did not see a deeper vanity in his feeling of superiority over his guests. Higsbee was a big beefy man, red of countenance and with a raucous voice that grated on Mark's nerves. He was rough, not to say boisterous, in manner, and his notion of wit was veiled smuttiness: essays to which Unity, incomparable hostess! paid the perfect compliment of a shocked laugh and a blush. Beneath his surface boldness ran an undercurrent of timidity that became ludicrous confusion on an occasion when a sharp glance from his lady called his attention to an error in the matter of forks.

Mark, with Henley's comment fresh in mind, was disposed to be critical of Mrs. Higsbee. She was small, a little too elaborately dressed and bejeweled, and assertive. Her admitted prettiness did not blind to something hard and metallic about her. "If I tapped her," Mark said to himself, "she would ring like a piece of brass." His choice of metal was happy.

How Unity, in her simple gown and delicate loveliness, shone by the contrast! She was gracious, restrained, and presided at the table with an easy grace that was altogether charming. This manner was not an inheritance from Bethel days, nor yet a studied acquisition from the city. It was a gift and proved beyond question that Unity, when she aspired to loftier planes, had the true vision. It is possible her sweetness, to those who did not care for honey in large quantities, might have been a bit cloying and cavilers would have said that she led the conversation too exclusively. But these were minor flaws to be forgiven in one so pleasing to the eye.

The dinner was well cooked and served, which was not always true when the Truitts dined alone. Mark ate sparingly, the while eying covetously the viands with which he dared not indulge himself. He barely tasted the wines, served as commanded in Unity's book on *Dinner Etiquette*. (Alas for the white-ribbon morality of Unity's upbringing!) He talked little, neither Higsbee's coarse daring nor the ladies' light gossip of plays, latest books and mutual acquaintances—especially of mutual acquaintances—being fields in which he felt at home. But he was secretly much amused when to Unity's casual mention of Mrs. Henley's call, Mrs. Higsbee replied with the invidious suggestion that Mrs. Henley was a good deal of a snob. And when Unity countered sweetly, "Do you think so? I haven't found her so," he chuckled aloud.

He explained the chuckle. "One mustn't look a gift horse in the mouth." At which crude remark Higsbee guffawed, Mrs. Higsbee tittered maliciously and Unity looked pained. All three had a suspicion of what he knew: that Mrs. Henley's call had been under orders, a gift from Henley.

Later he smoked, slowly and very appreciatively, a mild cigar, which lasted until Higsbee had consumed the second.

"How," Higsbee asked once, untactfully, "did you get Henley to send his wife around?"

Mark resented the question. "I didn't get him to."

"No?" Higsbee looked a bit incredulous. "Well, you certainly do stand well with him. Say, if you get a chance, I wish you'd drop him a hint that we'd be glad to have her call."

"I'm afraid," Mark said coldly, "Henley isn't a man to take that sort of a hint kindly."

"I wish you would," Higsbee urged. "Mrs. H. is crazy for it. And I reckon," he laughed lumberingly, "the best way is to get a woman what she wants. It's comfortablest, anyhow."

"I haven't found it so," Mark lied, adopting Unity's tactics, and promptly changed the subject.

Still later they played—yes, euchre. Higsbee railed at his hands. Mrs. Higsbee hovered always close to that tormenting topic, Mrs. Henley. Unity made as many blunders as the game permitted and charmingly confessed her stupidity. Mark, with nothing but this pastime to distract his mind, was acutely sensible of his aching hip.

This did not allay the irritation that had been rankling since his talk with Henley. It made him savage in his mental criticisms of the guests. He even joined with the cavilers and found fault with Unity and her manner. . . . Mark was one of those who had no taste for honey. This may have been a variation of the case of the philosophic fox, since that condiment was served to him but seldom and then only as reward for some unusual concession. It was his portion to listen to Unity's complaints. Unity—at home—had a talent for complaint and a pertinacity of utterance that were nothing short of remarkable. This had the virtue of exercising his patience, but there were moments, especially during exhibitions of Unity's company manner, when he wondered how long he could put off his inevitable rebellion.

But at last the Higsbees left.

"Thank heaven!" exclaimed Mark. "And to think that that man is one of the best labor handlers in the country!"

"*Bourgeois!*" Unity gave a shrug and a nod to include the departed guests.

"Spell it."

Unity complied.

"Hmm! I happen to know what it means." He gave her a look of mock admiration. "Unity, you're a wonder. You've got the nerve of a winner. You travel too fast a gait for me. Who could believe that less than six years ago you were back in Bethel, keeping company with tight-fisted Bill Slocum!"

But Unity was too well pleased with herself just then to resent this cruel reminder. "Don't you *see* why I am so anxious to get up above such people?"

"I can see," he said, "I shall have to give in."

She went to him with a little cuddling movement, locking both hands over one of his shoulders and looking up at him. She made a pretty picture. A mirror over the mantle reflected it for him.

"Oh, Mark, you make me so happy! Tell me the truth. *Aren't* you glad I made you come back to the city, and that we've got so far—and that we're going so much farther?"

"You insist upon the truth?" He looked thoughtfully at the reflection. "Well, I suppose I must be. Otherwise you couldn't force me to buy the new house, even though you are a very capable bully—"

"Bully!"

"Exactly. Only," he continued, "I still have a sense of proportion. We are rather absurd, you and I, Unity."

She laughed contentedly. "I know you. It's like you to growl when you're doing a specially nice thing." She held up her lips to him.

"And is this my reward? Magnificent!" But he did not kiss her. He looked curiously at her. Long ago he had been undeceived. He knew that the shallow tenderness and admiration summoned by her sweetness of flesh and perfect grooming were not love. He gently disengaged himself.

"No, thanks! I might acquire the taste. And it's

too expensive." He limped away from her and pretended to examine a book that lay on the piano.

She assumed an air of gentle reproach. "Oh, Mark, you don't mean *that*?"

She did not detect the warning note in his laugh.

"Oh, no! Of course not!"

He returned to her. They kissed.

CHAPTER XIII

TROPHIES

“**M**ETEORIC” was the word most often used to describe Truitt’s rise. It was a career possible only in his chosen industry and at that time when, no matter how fast plants were multiplied and new devices adopted, the output could not keep pace with the world’s insistent demand for steel. It did not differ notably from the careers of several other young superintendents of the Quinby company, save in the one particular, that Henley’s preference had deepened into something approximating friendship. On Mark’s side the friendship was not open to question; his admiration and liking for Henley were unbounded and not dependent on favors received. No doubt this genuineness, which Henley was keen enough to perceive and human enough to value if only for its rarity, had much to do with the older man’s attitude. It is certain that during this period of Mark’s life, Henley and Henley’s ideals were the controlling influence.

Henley, however, put Mark’s sincerity to no test. Mark’s genius was productive, not acquisitive. Problems in mechanics, in organization and in the control of men he could solve brilliantly; in matters of finance he was merely shrewd. But the man who

had Henley as a friend and counselor had no great need of financial genius. The time soon came when Mark's growing fortune was more than able to meet the demands of the campaign of Unity and her sister matrons around the walls of Jericho.

Jericho? That narrowly limited circle, of course, which by virtue of sundry possessions and constant reiteration claimed the rank and privileges of that ubiquitous order, aristocracy. A rather flimsy title theirs, perhaps, but a scant three generations having died since their ancestors—very respectable, it is now believed—tavern-keepers and farmers, blacksmiths and boat-builders, had patented the lands the city's growth afterward made so valuable. And a very pleasant folk they were, these descendants of pioneers, harmless, at least to all but themselves, albeit a bit mad on the subject of their own importance and overzealous to keep their portals clean from the stains of unsanctified feet.

At least they had been—until the advent of steel. The Jerichoans, secure within their buttressed walls and highly amused, had seen a troop without aping the importance of those born important, building big houses, taking costly pews, bedecking their women with silks and laces and jewels, even blowing an occasional blast on their horns. Jericho could well laugh at that feeble trumpeting. And then, overnight, as it seemed, the besiegers increased both in numbers and in importance; Jericho scoffed, "Newrich!"

But they scoffed not long. For when the out-

siders began to build other houses, bigger and finer than any within the walls, to count their dollars in hundreds, not in tens, of thousands and to entertain with a lavish splendor that seemed to the dazzled Jerichoans almost metropolitan, the besieged city, though its walls had not fallen, threw wide its gates—and rushed ingloriously out to greet the besiegers. Unhappy Jericho, its only value, inhospitality, gone, led captive and frantically glad to be captive! A new city, better fortified, had been raised, and Mrs. Thomas Henley was its governor.

The surrender was in sight when the Truitts moved into their new house. It was a rambling, red-brick, ivy-grown structure containing eighteen rooms and surrounded by wide neglected grounds, and had been built half a generation before as a wedding present to Timothy Woodhouse III. Timothy was a first citizen of Jericho—or could have been, had he cared for that preeminence. But in him the breed had cast back and produced an enfeebled copy of the first Timothy Woodhouse, an itinerant tinker who had crossed the mountains to ply his trade and establish his line. Timothy III. was a dreamy-eyed forceless man who loved above all things to tinker away in his little shop at fearful and wonderful devices that never would go. An expensive avocation for Timothy, since the cost of worthless patents plus a childlike trust in the prophecies of promoters played havoc with the snug fortune gathered by his grandfather; so expensive that, when the time came to send his daughter away to school, he felt obliged

to sell his big house and move into a more modest one.

For several months Mark secretly congratulated himself on the purchase. Unity had the new house to wander over and admire. She had four servants to direct. Within the allotted time she had returned Mrs. Henley's call, and after an anxious period, Mrs. Henley called again; seeing which, certain other ladies of St. Swithin's who had attained the half-way station where they were very careful upon whom they left cards, called and invited her to share the activities of the guilds. All of which made for happiness, content. Unity found little to criticize, she was engrossed with the game of being a fine lady, which she felt sure was her vocation.

Thus peace abode in the Truitt household and Mark, freed from the irritation of constant bickering, was enabled to give himself wholly to work. He did not realize that during this truce he grew away from his wife more rapidly than when domestic in-harmony kept her constantly in his thoughts. During these months he completed his improved process for rolling steel cold, which made some noise in the industrial world.

But there is nothing to which our species so readily adapts itself as to luxury. Content dissolved. Unity began to complain of the heavy labor of ordering so big a house. She resumed her criticisms of Mark, finding fault with his fashion of dress, his manners, his habits and his neglect of her. She was seized with a devouring mania for amuse-

ment, filling the house almost every evening with guests and demanding that Mark perform his duties as host. Other evenings she dragged him to the theater, which he detested. When he, rendered peevish by late hours and boredom, suggested that there were matinées, she put on an injured air that was more irritating to him than outright temper.

"Other men are glad to go out with their wives."

"Other men don't have to work so hard as I do."

"You think of nothing but money."

"Devilish lucky for you," he was indiscreet enough to retort; and she did not emerge from her sulks for several days.

But at last the gnawing canker was disclosed. One evening so stormy that no guests had come, Unity went up to his study where he was making the most of this respite. She talked ramblingly for a while.

"Well, Unity, out with it!" he exclaimed impatiently, after several minutes. "What do you want? As you see, I've got a great deal to do."

"I wonder what is the matter with Mrs. Henley?"

"You ought to know. You see her often enough, don't you?"

"Yes, I see her—at church! And we call. But she never invites us to the things she gives. I wonder why?"

"Probably because she doesn't want us."

Unity looked her protest at this blunt speech. But she did not abandon her project.

"I should think, if you're such good friends with Mr. Henley, you could manage it easily enough."

"Now you can stop right there," he answered emphatically. "I'm pretty soft, but there's one thing I draw the line at. And that's 'managing' to get invited to other people's houses. That's flat!"

And on that he was firm, though he was made to pay in many ways for his refusal.

But in due time and without management a dinner invitation came; on whose initiative, being a secret neither Henley nor his wife has ever disclosed. Hence we may not speak surely as to the accuracy of certain inferences that Unity drew.

"You see!" she cried, showing the note to Mark. Her manner said plainly, "I alone did it, in spite of the indifference of my husband."

"I see," he responded dryly. "Are you going?"

She treated this question to the contemptuous silence it deserved.

Great were the preparations for that critical occasion. And as Mark stood in the hall and watched her descending the stairs for the start, he was bound to confess that she made a fair—oh, a very fair—picture. The new gown was of creamy satin and lace and left her arms and throat bare. Her thick dull golden braids were coiled in a way to suggest a crown and her slightly upturned chin gave her the proud patrician air supposed to be the badge of those born to satin and laces. Her eyes shone with excitement and a heightened color compelled attention to the purity of her complexion. But he could

look upon her now, even when she was at her loveliest, without admiration or tenderness, with no emotion at all but impatience for her prodigal incompleteness.

"Why," he wondered, "did the Almighty make so pretty a shell and put nothing in it?" This seems to prove that he had been pretty effectually disillusioned.

However careless he might affect to be, he was himself keenly elated over the event. Often he had asked himself why Henley, so friendly in all else, had never let down the bars before his home. And as he mounted the steps toward the opening door, he could not repress the thrill of exultation. At that very window he had stood, a raw country youth much in awe of the Arabian Nights' wonders he beheld, and Henley had caught him and called him "Peeping Tom" and sneeringly sent him off to find a job with the labor gang. Now he was about to be received, a welcomed equal, by Henley, who, too, had grown tremendously since that night. He laughed. . . . He had said, prophetically, "Unity will like that." The laugh ceased.

He had need of the stimulus of his exultation as he and Unity faced that roomful of people who—well, were in longer practise at this sort of thing than was he. He limped, with something less than Unity's aplomb, across the room to meet his hostess, who murmured graciously something quite unintelligible, and Henley, who seemed rather bored. Then he was introduced to his dinner partner, Mrs.

Belloc, who mistook his set expression for sternness, and was in the end led by her without mishap to their places near Henley's end of the table.

He had no small talk and Mrs. Belloc, after one or two barren essays, allowed him a breathing spell. So for a while he sat silent, watching Unity who, almost across from him, was gazing soulfully up to, and being in turn ogled by, a handsome portly gentleman, very sure of himself, no less a personage than the rector of St. Swithin's. If Unity felt any nervousness, she had risen nobly above it.

Mrs. Belloc returned firmly to her duty.

"You're a member of St. Swithin's, aren't you?"

"I'm—er—a contributing member."

"Don't you love it? We all do."

"Do you?"

"Yes. And Doctor Palmer. We all love him, too."

"Naturally. Because he loves you all, doesn't he?"

"He's my ideal of a rector. I think he has such a —an air—"

"Undoubtedly," Mark encouraged, "an air—"

"Like a—a shepherd?"

"Well—call it that."

"And when he reads the service, his voice—so fine and musical—like a—" The simile was obscured in a burst of laughter from the reverend gentleman himself. Mark reached convulsively for his wine-glass.

"Like a—what?"

"Like violin."

"Oh, I thought you said violet."

"Oh! Hardly that. You couldn't call him like a *violet*, could you?"

"Frankly, Mrs. Belloc, I couldn't." A little relieved, he set the glass down.

"And his sermons," Mrs. Belloc sighed rapturously. "So helpful! His lecture on the Sermon on the Mount—it made us *all* want to live it."

"Did he improve on the text, then? Or, at least, he must have amended it?"

"He *couldn't* do that, you know."

"But I should think he'd have to—in St. Swithin's—"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, aghast, and fled again, as you may say, for refuge to her other neighbor. Later Mark heard her say something about some one's "irreverence". He inferred that it was his.

Not again did she return to Mark for more than a perfunctory remark. Mrs. Saunders, his other neighbor, showed no wish to come to his rescue. He resigned himself to a lonely evening.

He found occupation in watching Unity. She was making no such heavy weather of it. The talkative and discreetly flirtatious rector now shared her with the man on her left; neither man, if Mark might judge from appearances, found the situation a cross.

They might well be content. Unity was at the very apex of her existence. She was the prettiest

woman present, with the loveliness of physical full bloom just before it begins to fade. Her heart's desire had been granted: no longer must she be content with carelessly tossed crumbs and crusts of pre-ferment; she sat, both literally and figuratively, at the table of the city's elect. For her, too, a straight way lay ahead and it promised to be a superlatively pleasant way. Never having formed the habit of analyzing success, she perceived no luck or favor, no recognition of the growing fortune of the grim-visaged, awkward, ill-at-ease husband who was taking this lesson of her worth and importance. She believed that the triumph had been won solely through her own efforts and peculiar fitness. Therefore she was fabulously happy. Scraps of the talk across the table floated to Mark, revealing to him a woman he had never known, gay without affecting the girlishness that was no longer hers, almost witty, with the subtle ineffable charm that to the pretty woman comes as an inspiration from happiness.

If Unity could have known the lesson he was in fact taking! His impatience at her incompleteness yielded to a yearning: not for Unity or for anything she could give, but for that which her outer perfection seemed to promise. To put it as the copy-book puts it, he suddenly wanted companionship, sympathy, love; for sooner or later even the successful man knows the need of those homely elements. Of them, he thought, he had been cheated. He blamed Unity. Her incompleteness left his life in-

complete. His yearning bred bitterness. He understood then something into which he had never yet been tempted: marital infidelity.

It took away his sense of triumph in his presence at Henley's board; he had had no sense of belonging there. He was led into criticism. He sneered privately at the great garlanded room, the flower-strewn table with its gleaming silver and crystal and monogrammed china as barbaric display; at himself and the other diners as a crew of vulgarians aping the manners and revelries of the purple wearers. It was cheap criticism of which lesser folk than the Truitts have been guilty. The men, at least, at that table, of the fine creative type, Corsicans, not Bourbons, wore the purple under the title of genius and achievement.

The salad was being served when Mrs. Saunders turned to him. Mrs. Saunders was one of the insecure ladies who, following Mrs. Henley's example, had called upon Unity. She had just been listening, too long for patience, to her partner's praise of Mrs. Truitt.

"I should think you'd be jealous. Mr. Hare is more than enthusiastic over your wife to-night."

"How very tactless!"

"Oh, no!" said Mrs. Saunders sweetly. "I quite agree with him. I think she's adorable. She reminds me so much of that portrait by—you know, the one that hangs in the Louvre."

"But I don't know. I've never been in the Louvre."

"Oh! I thought *everybody* had been there."

"You see, Mrs. Saunders, I'm not anybody."

"You would say that, of course. One hears—"

"But it's quite true. To prove it, I've never been east of this city. In fact, the first time I came to this house—not so very long ago—I peeked through the window at the party. Henley caught me." He grinned wryly. "The next day I got a job handling pick and shovel."

"How very romantic!"

"You wouldn't call it romantic, if you'd been in Houlahan's gang."

"And then, of course," Mrs. Saunders beamed, "you set out to win the princess?"

"The princess? Oh! my wife. Yes, I suppose so."

"She has always lived in the city, hasn't she?"

"You'd think so, wouldn't you?" Mark glanced critically at Unity. "But she hasn't. Eight years ago she was living in Bethel. And Bethel, Mrs. Saunders, you'll never find on the map."

"Oh!" Mrs. Saunders said innocently. "I had inferred—but that *perfect* manner! She must have acquired it at her finishing school?"

Mark chuckled. "Finishing school! I wish you could see Miss Smith's Seminary for Young Ladies. It isn't even a starter."

Mrs. Saunders laughed admiringly. "How very clever! I must tell your wife."

She leaned forward a little toward Unity. "Oh, Mrs. Truitt—"

Unity gave ear.

"I must tell you the clever thing your husband just said. We were talking about your school—Miss Smith's Seminary, wasn't it? And I called it a finishing school. And Mr. Truitt said"—Mrs. Saunders' voice carried well—"it isn't even a *starter*. Awf'ly good, I think." A faint titter ran down the table. "Ah—where *is* Miss Smith's Seminary, Mrs. Truitt?"

It was Henley himself, strange to relate, who came to Unity's rescue.

"Never, Mrs. Saunders," he remarked, with an edge to his voice that the men recognized, "never uncover the past—here, at least. Only the other day Saunders was telling me he often wakes up in a cold sweat, because he has heard in his dreams, 'Dig in, ye tarrier!'"

The men all laughed reminiscently. Unity and Mrs. Saunders exchanged sweetest smiles. The dinner resumed its even tenor.

"Now," Mark grimly reminded himself, "I've let myself in for it."

But anger was surging. He deemed that, through Unity, he had been made ridiculous.

The evening passed. Mark handed a smiling Unity into their carriage. Not a word passed between them during the drive homeward, nor until they were in their house. Mark led the way to the library. The gas-jets were not lighted, but the glow from a generous log fire threw their angry faces into sharp relief, as they faced each other.

"Well, Unity, I suppose we're going to have this thing out."

"How could you?" she began stormily. "And on this night of all nights! Didn't you know she was leading you on?"

"Yes—when it was too late."

"The sugary jealous snob! She thinks because she's been abroad and came from Philadelphia she's so aristocratic. And you—you—helped her to shame me before them all."

"How could I know that my wife had been—fibbing about her antecedents?"

"Would you have me admit them to her and have her patronizing me? Haven't you any pride?"

"Haven't you any self-resp—"

But the bitter retort was halted, bitten off by the quick tightening of his jaws. When he resumed, he spoke in a slow, distinct, quiet voice that Unity had never heard.

"On second thought, we will not have this out. We couldn't agree as to where the offense lies. No!" He raised a hand, sharply, in protest, as she began hotly to interrupt. "I mean that—quite. I'll remind you that I'm not a culprit boy but a husband—who has at last cut his leading strings. Also that we have had enough scenes in our pretty career together, one more would be too many."

"You take that tone—to *me*?"

"Even to you."

But once before—when on a hilltop he had sternly demanded, "Do you make this a condition?"—

had she glimpsed this side of Mark Truitt. She was quick to perceive, when her interest was threatened. Now intuition read aright from his new tone that this easy complaisant husband who had granted all her demands, humored her caprices and meekly submitted to her tempers, whom she had grown almost consciously to regard as a convenient agency for her purposes, his ministry to her whims but the natural and proper fulfilment of his prime function as a husband, had indeed and at last rebelled. She did not know how or why, but she knew that the man's iron quality, which had won for her the things she craved, was now turned against her. She stared, too amazed for anger.

"Why, what do you mean?"

"You may take it as a declaration of independence."

"Are you thinking," she gasped, "of—of *divorce*?"

"Not yet. That may come, though. It depends—" He even smiled.

She tried a weapon that had been effective, her pose of long-suffering injured innocence. But Unity, like all the pampered, was a coward. He was, intuition again told her, capable of carrying out the cool menace in his last words. The pose broke down miserably. Forgetting the anger in which she had come to the interview, she went toward him with a frightened whimpering cry.

"Oh, Mark!"

He turned away with a careless lift of his shoulders and a curt, "Good night."

Alone in his workroom he sat before the fire, staring despondently into the dancing flames.

He knew that on the sudden impulse of his resentment he had defined anew the relation between him and Unity and had freed himself from the thousand and one petty irritations that had eaten away his endurance. But he could find no joy in victory over a weak shallow woman. Freedom could not assuage the gnawing hunger of his loneliness.

A profound disgust filled him, a sense of loss and cheat. His achievements were as nothing. The scene he had just passed through, climax to eight years of domestic discord and discontent, seemed to sum up his striving. For this he had survived the trials of the mills, defied and conquered physical weakness and suffering, held himself down to the hard, ascetic, narrowing grind. He had schooled himself to meekness under a tongue with a genius for provocation, swallowed his disappointment and refused to seek elsewhere, as did other men, what his own home could not afford. For this!—it was a scanty recompense.

"I have been a fool," he said. "I have given up enough. Now I will let go."

As well as he could, he tried to keep that promise to himself.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE MOLD

THEN began what promised to become a rake's progress. Mark sought out new companions and got himself invited to join their revels. He tried hard, at first recklessly, then determinedly and then wistfully to enter into the spirit of dissipation. The attempt was a flat failure. He had been too long under self-control to find pleasure, even distraction, in license. The thoroughgoing habit of mind that looked unerringly for the last result saw through at once to the dregs in the cup. His companions privately laughed at the spectacle of this hard serious man awkwardly essaying the rôle of devil of a fellow; but for the humor he thus unwittingly provided they would soon have got rid of him as a death's-head at their feasts. He succeeded only in still further impairing his health, in acquiring a bad taste in the mouth and relaxing all along the line his habit of rigid abstemiousness.

After a few months he returned to the old routine.

"I hear," Henley interrupted a consultation one day to remark, "you've been sowing wild oats. Got 'em all harvested?"

Mark nodded, grinning sheepishly. "Crop's in the barn—and for sale cheap. I agree with the prophet that all is vanity."

"What made you do it?"

"I don't know. To see what it's like, I guess. But I didn't have the knack of it."

"Trouble at home," thought Henley shrewdly.

Aloud he said, "I imagine not. You'd better stick to business, where you fit in."

"I sometimes think that's all vanity, too."

"At least we have something to be vain over. And on the whole there's more romance in making steel than in helping to support the Tenderloin."

Mark made a gesture of disgust. After a frowning pause, he answered, "I don't know. The trouble is, I've lost the romantic point of view. To me the business is nothing but a money-making machine now—and something to do. I wonder why we work so hard to get money we don't need. We get no good out of it. Timothy Woodhouse gets more pleasure out of his flying machines that won't fly."

"Just wait," said Henley dryly, "until somebody tries to take it away from you. Nearly every man of unusual vitality goes sooner or later through the stage of questioning the existing scheme of things. Things are, is all the answer he gets. The sooner he quits asking questions, the better for his peace of mind."

They returned to the matter in hand, which was the fleecing of Timothy Woodhouse.

No one would have been more surprised than

Timothy to learn that he had any fleece worthy of the attention of such shearers as Henley and Truitt. But years before a Lochinvar had come out of the West with stock to sell in the Iroquois Iron Ore Mining, Development and Transportation Company. He had a gifted tongue. He departed for his own place, a richer and doubtless a wiser man, having received a profitable lesson in the credulity of his fellows. Later inspection revealed that the long-named company's properties consisted of an immense field of admittedly good ore, but its development work only of the extraction of the samples so proudly exhibited by the promoter and its transportation facilities of a franchise to build a railroad through three hundred miles of wilderness. In those days the building of railroads was not lightly undertaken. The investment seemed to fall short of Lochinvar's prospectus.

"Naturally!" Timothy once said ruefully. "Since I invested."

But a time had come when makers of steel began to operate on a larger scale and to look far ahead into the future. The MacGregor company conceived the project of buying that ore field and building that railroad. It commenced secretly and leisurely picking up blocks of stock in Lochinvar's company; it could be bought for the proverbial song. But Henley got wind of it. He, too, began buying stock, secretly and swiftly, also for a song. By the time the MacGregor company learned of his rivalry, he

needed but a thousand shares to own control of the company, its properties and franchises.

"And I know just where those shares are to be had," Henley told Mark. "Do you know one Timothy Woodhouse?"

"I bought my house from him. And he wants me to lend him money to build his new flying machine. He came to me," Mark chuckled, "as one inventor to another."

"Get that stock," Henley commanded. "Act quick and you can get it cheap. We can't build that railroad. Or rather, we won't. Let the other fellow blaze the path!" This sneering quotation was from the illustrious but cautious Quinby. "That's what comes from working with a coward. But that's no reason why we shouldn't turn an honest dollar at the expense of MacGregor, is it?"

It is not, however, true, as alleged in the bill in equity Timothy was afterward induced by MacGregor agents to file against Mark, that "the said Truitt falsely and fraudulently and with intent to deceive and defraud, represented to the said Woodhouse that said stock was of no value whatsoever, the while knowing that said stock had the value hereinbefore set forth." Mark, who prided himself on his honesty, was always careful not to lay his projects open to legal interference. In this case, that special Providence which seems to guide the schemes of men of such honesty, graciously rendered legal fraud unnecessary.

"By George!" he exclaimed when at their next meeting Timothy, with the model before them, had explained his plans for the new machine. "By George! It may be—it may just be—that you've hit it. It sounds plausible, anyhow."

"I prize your opinion," said Timothy gratefully, "the more because you've done something mechanically yourself. I meet so much skepticism. Do you think you'd care to finance this?"

"Well," Mark returned to caution, "after all, aerial navigation is hardly in my line. I really ought to have some security, don't you think?"

"I'll give you," proposed Timothy eagerly, "a half interest in the machine."

Mark seemed to be fighting down an impulse. But he shook his head. "You see, its value would be scientific rather than commercial. And I'm just a plain money-grubber, you know."

Timothy sighed. "That ends it, I guess. All I've got is mortgaged to the limit now. I'm disappointed, though."

"Still," Mark went on slowly, "I'd like to do it. Haven't you anything that would give business instinct even an *excuse* to be silent?"

"Nothing. Unless," Timothy ventured timidly, "you could call Iroquois Iron an excuse."

Mark grinned broadly. "I've heard of that bubble."

Timothy, too, grinned, though unhappily. "Bubble, I'm afraid, expresses it exactly."

Mark spent a minute in frowning study of the

model. "It *would* be something," he admitted at last, "to contribute even money to what might turn out to be the invention of the age. I believe—I believe I'll take the excuse." He made a sudden reckless gesture. "I'll do better. I'll go the whole hog and *buy* the stock. Mr. Woodhouse, you would talk the birds out of the trees!"

It was ridiculously easy.

But the event had a sequel. Scarcely a week passed when Timothy returned. Timothy was evidently excited.

"Have you discovered some new important principle of your machine?" Mark inquired.

"No," Timothy answered. "I have come to buy back that stock."

"Oh, no! I'm satisfied with my bargain."

"But," Timothy explained innocently, "I have discovered that it has a value in excess—very much in excess—of what you paid me for it."

"The less reason then," Mark smiled, "why I should sell it back to you."

"But," Timothy swallowed hard and down went pride, "you don't understand. It would be a great favor to me. I have been careless—I may as well speak out and say that I am a very poor business man. I have lost almost everything I inherited. What is left is mortgaged almost to full value, except this stock which I now find I can sell for enough to clean up my obligations and give me a new start."

"And which is now mine."

"Which is now yours, through a hard bargain—

an inadvertently hard bargain, of course," Timothy added hastily. The troubled look in his eyes deepened. "And now I come to you as one gentleman to another, to ask you to release me from it."

"That would hardly be businesslike."

"But this is not business. I said, as one gentleman to another." Timothy was guiltless of humorous intent. "For myself I shouldn't think of disturbing any advantage your interest in my work might accidentally give you. But to my wife and daughter, who are entirely dependent upon me, this would mean much."

"Isn't it a little late, after wasting your substance in riotous invention, to begin thinking of them? Besides," Mark looked at his watch pointedly, "I hardly see your right to ask me to give them the consideration you've never given them."

Timothy flushed painfully, rising. "You refuse, then?"

"I do."

"Then you had this stock in mind all along?"

"If you'd made as shrewd a guess before—" Mark grinned.

Timothy put off his suppliant attitude. He drew himself up to his full height and squinted contemptuously at Mark through his spectacles. And, although long neglect of the vanities of this world has lost him the fine seigniorial air that is the birth-right of the citizens of Jericho, he was not altogether ridiculous.

"I was told you are apt to do this sort of thing."

"The loser in a deal," Mark reminded him coldly, "always finds something to criticize. If there's nothing else I can do for you—good day, Mr. Woodhouse."

"So this is what you call a deal? I should choose another term. I shall take enough of your time to give you my view of it. You came to me to get that stock, but you did not come frankly. You resorted to subterfuge. You flattered me. You took advantage of your inside knowledge of its value and of the fact that I'm rather a fool in such matters to get it absurdly cheap. But I suppose one need hardly expect particularity of conduct from your sort."

Mark sneered. "At least you felt no obligation to particularity of conduct when you thought you were getting a good round sum for something of no value at all."

"That," said Timothy with dignity, "I supposed and you pretended was practically a gift to science. I shall keep you no longer, sir."

And Timothy stalked away. For several days Mark's familiars observed in him an unusual irritability of temper.

Steel had come into its own. It was the first principality of industry. Swiftly as the sun seeks its zenith, its leaders were rising to power and prestige, doing big things in a big, bold, precedent-defying fashion that stirred the world to a just admiration. And above the others—in the estimation of all who did not march with the army of steel—

towered that giant MacGregor, and in his shadow but too big to be obscured wholly, Jeremiah Quinby, their names and fame known wherever the stout fabric was used.

Princes royal also of philanthropy, as well as of industry! For, though hitherto the Scot had reigned solitary in the realm of beneficence, Jeremiah Quinby now emerged from the shadow, and for a brief but shining hour, took stand beside him, in height and breadth and thickness neither less nor greater than his rival.

After many years Quinby's project was a fact, the more splendid for the delay. It stood just across the street from MacGregor's library. This proximity called for a comparison, by which the Institute of Paleontology suffered no whit. Somehow its noble lines and masses, in exact copy of the Parthenon, seemed to suggest in its founder a simple majesty of character not shared by the author of the elaborate library.

MacGregor could not have believed that a comparison was intended, since he accepted an invitation to share with Quinby himself and an ex-president of the United States the honors on the occasion of the dedication. He, as did the ex-president, made a speech, in which he paid a high tribute to his "brother in the great work of distributing surplus wealth". This tribute Quinby, when his turn came, formally assigned to "the thousands of obscurely faithful" who had "given their strength, their courage, their

patience and talent, nay, oft their very lives, to up-building the industry which made this project possible." Some of his hearers interpreted this merely as the too great modesty of superlative, triumphant genius. But when, expanding this text, he thus brought his peroration to a close: "Let labor and capital, the Siamese twins of production, dwell together in unity, in amity, in the forbearance that springs from love!" the audience applauded enthusiastically, reckless of damage to new kid gloves. The few frowns that appeared involuntarily were lost to view in the general joyousness of the occasion.

That evening, in the *cella* of the institute, was held a great reception. The Truitts were there—as who that counted was not?—but together only until they had reached the end of the receiving line. Mark betook himself to a chair in a corner occupied by the skeleton of some prehistoric monster and there watched the crowd.

He had again the sense of disappointment that latterly had been his portion. The scene and his participation in it—even to the extent of looking on through the leg bones of a reconstructed dinosaur—were one of the trophies of his campaign of conquest, one of the few incidents that distinguished victor from vanquished. Once he had thought much upon victory and its trophies. But for them when achieved, as for the sowing of wild oats, he could find neither knack nor taste. He felt resentfully,

bitterly alone. Also, though he would not admit it to himself, he was almost at the end of his physical resources.

"What holds me?" he asked himself moodily. "Why, since I'm not cut out for it, don't I throw it over?"

His only answer was another question. "But what else could I do?"

He caught a glimpse of Unity, a beaming happy Unity, the center of a laughing group, and scowled angrily. . . . Though their life had been superficially unchanged, he had had his freedom. It had been a partial useless freedom that he did not want, paid for by the loss of even the pretense of affection, by an ill-disguised mutual aversion.

"But what does she care?" he sneered bitterly. "She has everything she wants—and I pay. I've been sacrificed to the vanity of a silly selfish woman."

He was honest enough to answer that. "No, that isn't true. She couldn't have done it without the help of my own vanity."

His reflections were interrupted by a hand on his shoulder. Henley sat down beside him.

"Taking it in?"

Mark nodded.

"We're outshone."

"As the stars by the sun. Do you care?"

"No!" snarled Henley, in a tone that gave his words the lie. Mark repressed another sneer. Here

was Henley, the man of magnificent achievements, of real genius, jealous as a woman over Quinby's hollow glory!

"He seems," Mark nodded toward the resplendent Quinby, "to attract the women."

"It's mutual. As I happen to know."

"So? I'd have classed him with the vestal virgins. Isn't he a little old for the woman game now, though?"

"He's in his fifties," Henley said, "and well preserved. And the man who has nothing to do but to idle around the globe and spend the money others make is always easy picking for the Delilahs."

"Quinby doesn't just meet my notion of a Samson."

"Samson," returned Henley, who felt the better for his outburst, "was a penny-wit."

Others also—Higsbee and Saunders and Hare—now sought the friendly shelter of the dinosaur. They were big capable men, each a specialist without a peer in his own line, but the days of furnace and rolls were as yet too recent to allow them ease or grace on such occasions. The tenor of their conversation indicated a lack of reverence for the science of paleontology. It was Higsbee who discerned the illogic.

"Hell!" he said crudely. "Didn't we build this? Then why make light of it? Let's go out and collect our share of the glory."

Later, Henley and Mark, too, left their refuge

and sauntered through the crowd. It chanced that Quinby espied them. He deserted an admiring group to greet them paternally.

"Have you seen the ex-president? He wants to talk with you."

This to Henley, who muttered something ungracious about a "dead lion". Quinby shook his head in good-humored protest and turned to Mark.

"You were at the dedication, of course?"

"No," Mark confessed, "I was working."

"Truitt," Henley quoted facetiously, "is one of the obscurely faithful who made this noble project possible."

"Ah!" Quinby breathed. "It *is* a noble project, is it not? I can't be sufficiently grateful that I was inspired to think of it."

"The band wagon," Henley admitted, "has its uses."

Quinby laughed. "The same old vinegary, skeptical Tom! The years haven't changed you."

"Not even," Henley rejoined dryly, "in my views on labor. Were you inspired to hatch those Siamese twins? That pair of chickens will come home to roost some day."

Quinby's eyes narrowed suddenly. For a moment he and Henley looked at each other steadily. Then the magnanimity that is philanthropy's handmaiden asserted itself. He laughed again.

"Come, come! I can't let you spoil my pleasure in this evening. A lifelong dream has been realized, thanks partly to you"—he placed a hand on Hen-

ley's shoulder "—commander in the field. And to you"—he laid the other hand on Mark "—his chief lieutenant."

It was a striking tableau. Quinby, modestly unaware of the many eyes upon them, held it a moment, then gracefully withdrew.

"My commander in the field!" sneered Henley. "Drunk! Blind drunk with self-importance!"

"How much better are we?"

"Sometimes," Henley said coldly, "you talk like a fool." He strode away.

Mark, left alone, began to pick his path gingerly around trailing gowns and chattering groups, in search of fresh air and quiet. But once, as he was passing a group of men, a remark arrested his attention. He did not know the speaker, but he halted sharply and addressed him.

"Who was that you said committed suicide?"

The man looked at him strangely a moment before answering.

"Timothy Woodhouse. It was practically suicide. He insisted on going up in his new flying machine. Broke his neck, of course."

Mark passed on quickly. Not so quickly but that he overheard an explanation.

"The man that skinned Woodhouse."

CHAPTER XV

STUFF OF DREAMS

WHEN his spirit for it was dying, Mark's campaign of conquest came to its grand climax: he became a stockholder in the Quinby Steel Company, one of the "young partners" of whom Quinby, in all things abreast of his great rival, was wont to speak with such paternal enthusiasm. Up to this time he had been merely an employee, handsomely paid but finding his chief reward from Henley's profitable friendship.

When, through Henley, Mark laid the matter of partnership informally before Quinby, he was allowed to see through the philanthropist to—Quinby. At first Quinby unctuously but firmly refused his assent, turning arguments aside by the simple expedient of ignoring them. When Henley, at whose suggestion Mark had demanded the right to purchase stock, insisted with rising anger, Quinby donned a frigid dignity.

"Do you want the company to lose Truitt?" Henley demanded.

"I can not conceive," Quinby answered coldly, "that any man who owes as much to my company as Truitt does could be so lacking in loyalty and all fine sensibilities as to desert me."

"That," said Henley curtly, "is damned nonsense. The company owes more to Truitt than the stock we ask can ever repay, more than to any other man—with one exception."

"I am glad," Quinby thawed slightly, "that you make an exception."

"Yes. Myself."

Quinby's face was a study.

"And," Henley continued, "you can let him have this stock or lose Truitt *and* me."

Thereupon Henley wrote out and gave to Quinby his resignation from the chairmanship. There was a tense silence while Quinby studied the paper.

"Very well," he said at last. He tore the resignation into little bits.

But it was a graceful surrender. During the pause Quinby had regained his poise. He was once more the gracious patron, apparently blind to Henley's show of dislike.

"Ah! my dear Tom," he shook his head smilingly, "that was hardly fair. You played upon my affection. You know there is no sacrifice I would not make rather than lose you."

"Humph!" grunted Henley. "This is no sacrifice."

"Of course," the philanthropist went on, "Truitt takes under our agreement."

And this launched another long argument. For under the Quinby company's agreement—borrowed, indeed, from his friend and rival, MacGregor—any stockholder, upon written demand by three-fourths

of the stockholders owning three-fourths of the outstanding shares, could be compelled to surrender his stock at its "book value"; a provision from the threat of which Quinby, owning the majority of the stock, alone was exempt. Had his own interest not been so deeply concerned Mark might have relished the spectacle of the tremendous arrogant Henley hurling himself in vain against the paternal Quinby. Mark did not deceive himself as to Henley's real purpose, which was not to serve him but to set up a precedent to upset the agreement.

"It isn't fair to Truitt," Henley protested vehemently. "It isn't fair to any one but you. How can he, how can I, how can any of us, know when you're going to make a deal with the others to kick him out and cheat him out of the real value of his stock?"

Tact was the one weapon Henley knew not how to wield. Quinby gave him a pained glance.

"You know I'm not a hard man. And you know that is a contingency not likely to happen."

"It happened to Caulder and Stebbins and New."

"Ah! But they," Quinby reminded him, "got an exaggerated idea of their importance to the company."

Henley glared. Quinby smiled.

The mellifluous voice flowed on. "You should know that men in my position may not consider their private impulses. Our wealth is a trust—a sacred trust." He paused, perhaps to control the rising emotion inspired by thought. "The secret of my success has been harmony in my organization. Har-

mony I must have—I will have. And so I must reserve the right and means to oust any who seek to disturb it. The work to which I have given myself—the projects you, I fear, hold so lightly—depends too closely on my business success to allow me to violate successful precedents. Even," he beamed on Mark, "even for the sake of your brilliant young friend. Even for you."

Quinby's face had not put off its smiling benevolent mask. His voice had not risen nor lost by so much as a note its wonted musical stately cadence. But Mark, a silent and almost forgotten listener, knew that in the last words menace spoke as clear and venomous as in the hiss of a snake. He could interpret the menace; Henley had rested too securely in his importance to the company; he now had his warning; like *Damocles'* sword the power of Quinby's contract rested heavy overhead.

If he had not known from Quinby's voice, Mark would have understood from him to whom the menace had been spoken. Henley's hands, resting on the desk, clenched until the nails bit into the palms. The ugly imperious face was deathly white. His black eyes blazed. Mark thought for a moment he was about to spring upon Quinby and inflict physical injury, or at least hurl at the vain shallow poseur the splendid defiance of the man of real worth, of invincible and unpurchasable spirit. Because he had a profound respect and a sort of love for Henley, he wanted to see and hear that defiance. He forgot his own interest in the scene.

Henley reached again, convulsively, for pen and paper. Quinby raised a hand—a beautiful, soft, perfectly manicured member—in humorous protest.

"My dear Tom!" How the purring paternal phrase, addressed to Henley, stung! Mark felt the hot blood rise, resentful for his master. "If you are about to resign again, I beg of you, consider. I have made one concession to that threat. But if you make it again, I shall be obliged to break off a relation that has been both pleasant and profitable. It will cost me something, perhaps, but—it will cost you more."

"Now!" muttered Mark.

Now was the time to hurl defiance, to overwhelm Quinby and Quinby's power under manly scorn. . . . Quinby, outwardly serene as midsummer's skies, smiled on. Henley was silent. The blazing anger in his eyes died down to a smoldering, sullen, futile rage. The pen dropped from his hand.

What a shattering of idols was there! Mark turned away that he might not see.

His glance fell upon Quinby. The mask of benevolence had been pulled aside. Ugly triumph and still uglier hate shone. In that moment Quinby's revenge for a thousand sneers and the open contempt of years was taken. Mark hated him.

After a long heavy silence Quinby turned to Mark. "Do you accept the agreement?"

"It seems to be Hobson's choice."

Quinby rose and took Mark's right hand in both of his.

"Let me be the first to welcome you into the company. I'm sure we shall be—harmonious."

"I can see," Mark answered with a shrug, "that harmony pays."

Quinby was gone. Mark, sickened and saddened, watched a man, for the moment mad, belatedly giving voice to his rage. He paced swiftly back and forth across the room, like the wild beast he had become. He cursed incoherently the departed Quinby, pouring forth a flood of coarse blasphemies. He flung his arms about, smote and kicked chairs and desk as though they had lives to be taken. This, with Quinby present, would have struck a responsive chord in Mark's barbaric soul. But this, with Quinby gone, from the man who had sat silent under threats, called forth only contempt.

"*My success! My company! My work!*" Henley stopped, panting and glaring, before Mark. "*My God! Did you hear him? Fool—fool—fool!*"

Mark shrugged his shoulders. "Your mistake was in thinking him a fool."

"And I—I had to sit there and take his oily threats—"

"At least, you took them."

"—I, who made this company—I, who gave him the money to advertise himself around the world—I! I'm the fool. You're the fool. We're all fools, working our lives out to build up this business while he, who does nothing, gallivants about spending millions on his accursed institutes—never know-

ing when he'll close in on us and rip us out of our jobs and rightful profits—”

“I used to think that about you, when I was in the mills. I suppose the men think that about us now.” Mark's laugh was a sneer.

Henley turned on him. “And you,” he snarled. “I made you, too. And I suppose, when Quinby cracks his whip, you, too, will fall into line and help to rob me of the stock I've made valuable. You, with your ‘Harmony pays’—”

An hour before Mark might have quailed before Henley's wrath. Now he did not quail.

“See here!” he said sharply, pushing away the fist under his nose. “Probably you're right. Probably I'll fall into line. I hope not—for my own sake. But you can talk to me like that when I give you the excuse. And now you,” he added coldly, “had better pull yourself together. There are clerks within hearing.”

Henley dropped heavily into a chair. Slowly the paroxysm subsided. In silence Mark watched the white, still working face.

It was Henley who spoke first, and surprisingly. “What are you thinking?”

“I'm wondering, does money make cowards of us all?”

Henley stared hard. For a moment Mark thought that again a match had been touched to the magazine of his rage. Then the red of shame crept into the older man's countenance. He made a gesture of dejection.

"You're a witness that it does."

Mark limped slowly away from the Quinby building. Around him streamed and swirled the late afternoon crowd. The rattle of traffic and the shuffling of feet rose in a hissing sinister roar. Overhead hung a heavy pall of mingled smoke and fog, oppressing the senses. Memory harked back to another such afternoon when a raw country youth, taking his first plunge into this maelstrom of humanity, caught the fancy of a remorseless voracious entity ready to pounce upon and crush the weak and the unwary. He smiled satirically at the simple-minded romantic youth thus recalled and at the youth's fancy.

"It was just like him." He thought of the young adventurer as another person. "He didn't know how easy it was—to the man who knows what he wants—or how it is done."

Now, by all the rules of the game he played, was the time to exult. The monster was tamed, or at least forever baffled; it need not, looking upon him, lick its slobbering chops. Whether or not the partnership—final trophy of Eldorado's conquest—survived Quinby's treacherous caprice, the adventurer would never again know the haunting fear that lashed the crowd. He had no need to catch its hurrying pace.

Yet he did not exult. He had what he had set out to win, and he had it not. His triumph was fact. But the sense of it, the swelling of soul, the surging passionate pride he had foretasted in his young dreams,

were not. Success was but figures on a balance sheet.

At every climax of his campaign circumstance had stepped in to make flat and bitter the cup of desire at his lips. He had schooled his body in frugality and self-denial, thinking of a future indulgence; when luxury and license and pleasure held out their arms habit refused him joy in their embrace. He had chosen the love that matched the more nicely his dreams; habit had confirmed that choice and taught him the bitterness of a nagging wife. He had dreamed and striven for conquest, to find himself a slave; for in his heart of hearts he believed that when—as must some day happen—Quinby cracked his whip he, as Henley had said and Henley himself had done, would cringe. He had avoided or been ruthless to sever the sweetening ties of life, lest they make harder his climb; when he found among the successful, an advantageous friendship, he must be shown the feet of clay. He had made of himself, despite handicaps, a brilliant efficient worker, only to lose interest in his chosen work; yet to the hard, serious, inelastic man he had become, a day spent out of the routine was a day miserable. He had succeeded in a life in which sentiment, brotherly kindness, mercy, were the badges of failure; yet the thought of a weak Timothy Woodhouse, dead in an hour of recklessness bred by a cheat, could drive sleep from his pillow.

It was the less satisfying because he foresaw the end of a chapter. He had spent himself: in body

—he was no longer capable of long intense application, he had fallen back upon the invalid's last resort, drugs; in mind—the creative faculty seemed dead, that very morning a young man in the mills had announced an important invention that was to have been Truitt's *magnum opus* and upon which his sterile brain had labored in vain; in soul—he could no longer dream. And for reward he had: the dry fact of a triumph he could not sense and the prospect of an empty, useless, discontented future.

He was a critic, you see; but not of himself. The world was out of joint.

Passers-by were diverted from their own cares by the sight of a well-dressed man stamping his cane on the pavement and muttering aloud, "An evil fate pursues me. Other men do as I do, desire as I desire and find content. Why can't I be contented—and happy?"

He did, indeed, but as did other men of his day and world. There was nothing in his time to direct his criticism upon himself. Not yet had a western Peter the Hermit come preaching his crusade, or a Richard Yea-and-Nay, of theoretic dash and vigor, to give the movement form and substance: to teach the crowd the trick of scrutinizing their neighbors and a few to examine themselves. It was a time when a handful dealt in the lives and needs and happiness of the many and covered the ugly traffic, not in romance, but with unconscious hypocrisy. An occasional preacher taught love, decency, unselfishness,

but he was paid for that and no one gave ear. The exploiters grew fat and resurrected an ancient theory to prove that their power and their profits were divinely appointed. When, swollen with vanity, they engaged in spectacular philanthropy, giving with their left hands of what their right had taken, a servile world fell to its knees to receive the tinsel gifts, humbly sensible of its unworthiness. It was a greedy age, an unthinking age, a smug age, above all an age of self, crowned, glorified and rewarded.

Little wonder, then—so much are we creatures of fashion—that, when desire was turning to ashes in his mouth, Mark Truitt sought no fault in himself, but impeached life.

A thousand faces streamed past him, unrecognized and unrecognizing. Then, at a corner where two currents dammed each other, appeared one that seemed oddly familiar. It was of an undistinguished homeliness, pasty pale, morose, matching well the general shabbiness of its owner. At first Mark, confused by the dirty brown beard, did not recognize him.

The man had no doubts. At sight of Mark an evil glitter sprang into the sullen eyes.

“You!”

By the hate that had lived through fifteen years Mark placed him.

“Piotr Andrezjzski!”

“Peter Anderson,” the man corrected him.

"That's a good American name. I'd forgotten you had a preference." Mark smiled and held out a friendly hand. "How are you, Peter Anderson?"

The hand was ignored. When Peter Anderson sneered, his homeliness became almost grotesque.

"Since you're so interested, I manage to keep alive."

"How do you manage it?"

"I'm a compositor on the *Outcry*—when there's any money for an issue."

"The *Outcry*?"

"You'll hear of it yet. It's the paper of our cause."

Mark knew of but one cause that employed the capital. "Socialism, I suppose." He smiled indulgently, "I hope it's in funds sufficiently often."

"I look it, don't I?"

The answer was so obvious that Mark avoided it. "How," he asked hastily, "is Roman?"

"He breathes and sleeps and eats. But he's dead."

"Is that a Socialist parable? I'm not a Socialist, so you'll have to explain."

"His mind's gone. It began to go soon after you stole his job. But probably you've forgotten that, too."

"I have no recollection," said Mark coldly, "of any such occurrence." With a curt nod, he passed on.

He had gone but a few steps when he halted and looked back. Peter, unmindful of elbowing pedes-

trians, was still at the corner, glaring at him. It came to Mark as of a piece with the failure of dreams, that of his beautiful youth, when men loved him so easily, this, the hatred that lived after fifteen years, was his only souvenir. He winced at the thought.

Impulsively he turned and retraced his steps.

"See here, Piotr," he said. "Let us not use hard names. There are a good many things we'd never agree on. But we can agree on this—you're hard up. I've been luckier than you. What can I do to help you?"

Piotr's lips formed a surly, "Nothing." But the refusal did not fall. A look of transparent craft displaced malevolence.

"Do you mean that?" he asked suspiciously.

"I'm not in the habit—"

"I don't care about your habits," Piotr interrupted ungraciously. "If you want to do something, you can lend me a hundred dollars."

"Lend," evidently, was a euphemism.

"What will you do—still, that's your business. Of course, I will. I wish you'd asked me something harder. Come along to the bank."

The bank was a few blocks away. Mark improved the time by asking the details of Roman's circumstances. Piotr, sullenness not lifted by the prospect of money, answered shortly. It was a pitiable story of descent: of the gradual dissipation of the savings of Roman's active years and the swift fail-

ure, through idleness and too much alcohol, of his mental powers, leaving him and Hanka dependent upon Piotr's scanty and uncertain earnings.

"Where," Mark asked, as they entered the bank, "do you live now?"

"Rose Alley."

"Rose Alley!" Mark stopped short. "My God!"

"What does your sort know of it?"

"Quite enough. Come along."

A few minutes later they were in the street again, Piotr the richer by the sum he had asked.

They stood facing each other: the strong man who had conquered and the inefficient, one of life's guerrillas, who had just taken of the strong man's largess. But the inefficient was not grateful; a hundred dollars could not conquer his hatred.

"I s'pose," he sneered, "you want me to thank you?"

"No. If you need more, come to me. And, see here, Piotr, I want you to get Roman and your mother away from Rose Alley."

"*You* want—!" The money in his pocket, Piotr threw craft to the winds. "What have you to do with us? Do you s'pose we'd let you help us?"

"But you took—"

Piotr chuckled—a chuckle of triumphant malice. "Did you think it was for us?" The chuckle grew into a laugh, as though he pondered some mammoth jest. "*You—you*—have just paid for the next issue of the *Outcry!*"

He wheeled and went haltingly away. Mark watched him until he turned a corner.

"Poor devil!" Mark shook his head pityingly.
"He's mad."

It was not Mark's habit to waste precious hours wandering the crowded city streets in introspective meditation. He now went to the appointment with his lawyer to keep which he had left Henley.

It was a long and tedious consultation, having to do with a big real estate deal in which Truitt had shown his customary shrewdness. He displayed little interest. More than once Shirley, the lawyer, had to recall his straying attention. Shirley was astonished at this; his client was notable for his concentration on the matter in hand. He would have been even more deeply astonished, could he have looked upon the picture that lured away Mark's thoughts. But then, for Shirley, the name of Rose Alley would have raised to life no dead memories.

Shirley's astonishment, however, reached its climax at the close of the consultation.

"It's a good deal," he remarked, "for you."

Mark answered with a nod and opened another subject. "I don't suppose Timothy Woodhouse left much."

"Practically nothing."

"How does our case stand?"

"We'll win it."

"You're sure of that?"

"Absolutely. His estate will never push it to trial."

"Then settle it."

Shirley whistled his surprise. "Has the philanthropic bee stung the whole Quinby concern?" he grinned. "I wouldn't do that, though. It would be an admission. As a lawyer, I couldn't advise—"

"I don't ask advice. Settle it."

Shirley waved a concessive hand. "It's your case, if course. For how much? They'll take any figure."

"For whatever you think fair. Not as a lawyer, however. Think of it," Mark smiled wryly, "as a gentleman—if the word means anything to you."

"It's your case," Shirley repeated. "But my notion is, people will think you don't want the publicity—for social reasons. That sort of talk—"

Mark rose abruptly. "I can't help," he replied, with an impatient frown, "what people think, can I? Fix it up as soon as you can."

But the day's adventures were not ended. The ghost of Timothy Woodhouse could not oust Rose Alley from Mark's mind.

The blacks, ordered by telephone, awaited him. Swiftly, Mark holding the reins, they were guided across a bridge, along rough-paved, tumble-down streets, into a quarter such as their aristocratic feet had never trod. Grime and decay were everywhere. The fog, mingling with the sulphurous clouds from the near-by mills, converted afternoon into a gray cheerless twilight that the saloon lights feebly essayed to dispel. Through the fog came the voice of the mills. The blacks' driver, senses refined and

sharpened by the custom of another sphere, looked about him and shivered.

It was fifteen years since he had seen Rose Alley, but he found the way as though he had taken it but yesterday. How could he forget? Rose Alley had been his first crossroads, where had been first revealed to him the price they must pay who would succeed. Thence he had taken the branch road that led to the offices of important lawyers, into the presence of the Henleys and the Quinbys. He had thought that branch the highway.

He drew up at the mouth of a narrow shallow court, and giving the reins to his man, got down from the trap.

In the shadow of the court the gloom was even more oppressive. The pavement was damp and unclean and rang hollowly under his cane. The dingy brick tenements, once red but now almost black, were nearing the last stages of dilapidation. A strong smell of garlic and fetid refuse blotted out all other odors. He thought it even worse than he had remembered. Doubtless it was, since Rose Alley, which needed it most, had had no favor from the passing years.

A few children—dirty, sallow, undersized—had been playing in the court. With difficulty, for they had not his tongue and were afraid of the stranger, he learned from them in which tenement Peter Anderson lived.

He groped and stumbled up two flights of stairs

that groaned protestingly under his tread. He found a door and knocked. It opened. . . .

For a full minute, speechless, he stared at the woman who stood on the threshold.

CHAPTER XVI

GLOWING EMBERS

“**W**HAT a woman!” he thought. “And in this hole!”

The promise of her girlhood had been kept. She was tall and erectly held. The figure silhouetted in the doorway was one to make men dream, full curved, strong with the strength of women whose forbears have always toiled, yet without heaviness; it was the strength that lies in quality, not in bulk. Her head was half turned toward him. He saw a mass of dusky hair rippling loosely away from a face that, white and sharply chiseled, would have been severe but for the long lashes and full red mouth.

She was not beautiful, as he had learned to define beauty. But she had no need of it. Vital she had been as a girl. In her full-blown womanhood that vitality had become a quality to surpass mere beauty; a quality that spelled power over men, that has made of unbeautiful women famous courtesans, great secret influences of history. Had she been ugly and clad in rags, he would have felt it. Jaded senses quickened. He forgot the squalid tenement, the gloomy passage. At the same time a nameless un-

wonted reluctance seized upon him, as though he faced, uncertain of the outcome, an important crisis.

She looked at him steadily, showing no surprise. And by that he read that she had learned to take life, its coincidences and its climaxes as they came, calmly, without loss of poise. Only to those, he knew, who had pitted themselves against the problems of existence and not failed was such attitude possible. She had not failed; to perceive this he did not need the testimony of her trim modish hat and suit, such as no denizen of Rose Alley ever wore.

She spoke first, in a low even voice that hinted even less than her manner at inner excitement. "I thought it was Piotr. Your step sounds like his."

They might have been daily familiars.

"Yes," he flushed. "I am somewhat in his case."

He almost missed the swift glance she cast toward his cane. But he was grateful that she had no comment for his injury. In the presence of her splendid perfections his own physical shortcoming seemed almost cause for shame.

"How do you do, Kazia?" he said gravely. "I didn't expect to find you here."

He held out an uncertain hand. She took it, neither hastily nor reluctantly, for a brief meaningless clasp.

"I am here sometimes. Will you come in?"

She stood aside and he entered, trying to overcome his limp. It was the kitchen, which in Rose Alley—as he remembered—had to serve as living-

room as well. It was clean, but bare; pitifully bare, he thought, calling to mind the plain but comfortable abode in which a staggering young soldier of fortune had found refuge. To the soldier had come fortune and with it the philosophy of the fortunate that decrees what a man has, to be the measure of his worth. But here that philosophy failed, could not silence a sudden accusing voice that cried, "Cruel, unjust!"

By the stove stood a little faded woman, much stooped, her hair white and thin, here pale lack-luster eyes for the moment brightened by a startled question. He went over to her and took her hand. She shrank away from him.

"It is Mark Truitt, *Matka*," said Kazia in Polish. "Don't you remember?"

Hanka said something in the same tongue.

"She says," Kazia interpreted, "they have never forgotten."

Their eyes met again. . . . His turned away quickly and went to the other occupant of the room. He sat in the only armchair, a huge mass of inert flesh, head slouched forward and fingers playing aimlessly with the long unkempt beard that reached half-way to the bulging waist. Mark laid a hand on his shoulder. Roman looked up. But Roman saw as the new-born babe sees.

The grasp on his shoulder tightened. "Roman, don't you know me? I'm Mark—Mark Truitt, you remember."

The shoulder stirred a little under the tight grasp. Roman's head slouched forward again and he began once more his aimless twisting of the long beard.

"How long," Mark's voice had become sharp, "has he been this way?"

"Almost three years."

"And here?"

"A year longer."

Kazia's eyes said, "What is that to you?"

A heavy silence fell, broken only by the confused clamor of the mills. It was a painful embarrassing silence to the intruder, who found a strange difficulty in explaining the impulse that had brought him. He himself did not understand that impulse or the even stranger emotion that struggled awkwardly within him for recognition, stopping speech.

"Why," he demanded, "didn't you let me know about it?"

She smiled—contemptuously, as it seemed to him.

"We must get them out of here," he went on hastily.

"We can't. Piotr won't let us."

"He must," Mark declared curtly.

"He will not," she repeated.

"I saw him to-day. He's crazy."

"He is. He's a good compositor and could make enough to keep them at least decently. But he prefers to work for the *Outcry*—for little or nothing.

Generally it's nothing. He says it's for the cause."

"But that's no reason why he shouldn't let me help them."

She shrugged her shoulders. "To Piotr it is. I know, because I've tried."

"Then," he said, "we'll take them away and settle with Piotr afterward."

He said it crisply, with the assured air of fortune's darlings who, having made their resolve, take its consummation for granted. Her faint smile showed again.

"It isn't so simple as that. They won't go."

"They won't go!" He stared. "Why not?"

"For one thing," she returned quietly, "the *Matka* loves her son. I'll ask her."

She turned to Hanka and for several minutes the two women talked earnestly in their native tongue. Hanka shook her head continuously.

"She says," Kazia returned to Mark, "'My Piotr wouldn't like it.'"

Hanka interrupted, laying a hand on Kazia's arm and looking anxiously toward the door. Kazia nodded.

"She says also," she interpreted again, "that we'd better go. It's most time for Piotr to come home. She's right."

"I think," Mark answered, "I'll stay, since I'm here, and have this out with Piotr."

"You'd better not." Her swift glance seemed to measure his physical frailty. "Piotr's temper is un-

certain. He found me here once and drove me out. It—" The gloom could not quite hide the color that surged into her cheeks. "It wasn't nice."

"Humph! Our Piotr seems to have developed into a lovely brute. Why should he drive you out?"

"He's bitter and he thinks he's proud. And he hates me. Probably you'd find he hates you, too."

"You think it safe to assume that?"

"I think," she said quietly, "this is one case your rich man's charity can't reach."

"But it isn't charity," he protested.

"What is it?"

"I'm sorry for them and—" He ceased abruptly, suddenly uncomfortable under her clear level gaze, and not yet willing to formulate even to himself his reason for this adventure. "I suppose you're right—a charitable whim. But just the same, since I've started, I'll see this through and wait for Piotr."

"No, you'd better not," she repeated with cold emphasis. "You can prove your inflexibility in some other way. Piotr is apt to have been drinking and if his temper is stirred up, he'll make *them* suffer." She nodded toward Hanka and Roman. "Really, you're quite helpless in the matter."

"I seem to be." He laughed shortly, to conceal a disappointment as undefined as the emotion set stirring by the sight of his old friends. "But, at least, I can leave some money."

But she shut him off from this, too. "No. What

money they can use without Piotr's knowing of it, I can furnish."

He limped stiffly toward the door, more hurt than he was willing to admit to himself by the rebuff and the failure of his impulsive mission. And indignant, too, at himself, that he had descended from his high sphere to lend a hand that was not wanted. Only the harsher sentiments, it seemed, could survive the years.

But at the door he looked and then turned around, held by a tableau that caused him—partner to Jeremiah Quinby!—to know a strange twinge. Kazia was saying her good-bys, to Roman with a kiss on his forehead and a little affectionate pat such as one gives a child, to Hanka with a lingering embrace. The cold unemotional mask of successful militant womanhood that she had presented to him was pulled aside. The sad wistfulness in her parting did not escape him. . . . He had been wrong. It was only with him that the sweeter sentiments perished. Even Piotr could win a loyalty that the temptation of release from almost squalid poverty could not break down.

He went quickly out into the dark passage, that he might not have to look longer, and there awaited her. When she came, he led the way down the rickety stairs and out into the foul smelling court, lighted up now by a swaying arc lamp.

"One would think," he blurted out, "you wanted to stay there."

"Do you find that so wonderful?"

"I'm glad you can't. It's no place for such as you."

"Many people have lived here."

"But not from choice. I know. I lived here once myself, before—" He hesitated a moment. "I left it to live with Roman."

She made no reply. He stopped, facing her and blocking her egress.

"You're thinking my going there was to the advantage of no one but myself?"

"Why else should you have gone there?"

She was standing in the doorway of the tenement, he on the pavement below her. The dark dismal court and the cold bluish light from the arc lamp did but emphasize the warm brightness she radiated. Frank wondering admiration was in his glance.

"That's almost cynical, isn't it? I might have had several other reasons—but didn't. At least I did *you* no harm."

"Neither harm nor good."

"One doesn't like to think of one's self as reduced to even a harmless nonentity. Still, most of the virtues are negative, I believe. Though I'm vain enough to wish I could have been a positive influence in the making of the woman you've become. It's rather remarkable, Kazia."

"It isn't remarkable—or excuse for vanity."

She had not winced, nor had her steady gaze wandered. But for just an instant a fleeting somber shadow had rested in her eyes.

"I must go," she said.

They walked in silence to the mouth of the court. At their approach Mark's man got down from the trap, touching his hat.

"Can't I set you home?" Mark ventured, not at all sure that she would accept. But she affected no reluctance.

She glanced at a little watch she wore. "I go to the Todd Hospital, and I've overstayed here a little. Will you save me time?"

"Will I save you time!" Mark affected a jocoseness he did not feel. "Felix, what have you to say?"

"Whist, mum!" Felix grinned. "Ye'll be hurtin' the feelin's av th' fastest team in th' city."

Kazia's smile was all for Felix. "They *are* splendid. I'll have to ride, if only to show I meant no unkindness."

"Good!" said Mark briskly. "Felix, you may take the car."

He helped her up to the seat. When Felix, as usual, would have lifted him, Mark covertly waved the man aside, though the high awkward step caused his lame hip to pain him sharply. The horses sprang forward, swung into the car tracks and quickly left the tenement neighborhood behind. For a time Mark gave his attention to guiding their swift course around overtaken cars and the slow lumbering teams that drew the heavy traffic of the street. They were on the bridge before either spoke.

"You said, to the hospital," he began suggestively. "Do you—"

"I'm on a case there."

"You're a nurse, then? I remember you had a knack for that sort of thing. Your husband—er—I hadn't heard—"

"I haven't seen him for twelve years."

He looked at her quickly, but her face was turned away. He had detected no change in the low even voice. But he knew instinctively that behind the fact so simply announced lay a story worth the hearing. And not a happy story—he sensed that, too. For her composure was not the assurance of those whose lives have been placid and easy, but the certainty that comes only to those who have passed—not always unscathed, but have somehow lived—through ordeal and strife. It was akin to the impassive front he had learned to present to the world.

"Of course, it isn't happy," he thought. "For it's a story of success. And there is always the price."

"Kazia," he asked gravely, "will you tell me about yourself?"

"There is nothing to tell—any more than there is about you."

"That is, you're not interested in what has happened to me. You're frank."

"Because a chance has thrown us together for an hour is no reason for us to pretend an interest neither of us can feel."

"You may speak for yourself, please. At least, we can oil the wheels of circumstance by going

through the polite forms. You could smile very graciously on my man Felix, but to me—" He broke off with a short laugh. "History has a way of repeating itself. I remember saying something of the sort to you once before. Of course, you've forgotten."

"I forget—nothing."

"Ah!" He turned quickly to her again. "Then I did do you harm."

"I can't see—"

"It follows," he interrupted. "If I had done you no harm, you would remember charitably, not coldly or worse, and you would be at least as cordial to me as to my groom."

"Now it is you," she answered after a thoughtful pause, "who will not let me oil the wheels. Probably what you say is right. I haven't thought much about influences—I haven't had time."

"I'm sorry. Which seems all I can do about it. You and Piotr and Hanka seem in a conspiracy to teach me that for regrettable things we can pay only with regret. But I promised to save you time."

He leaned forward and drew the reins taut. He touched the horses lightly with the whip. The pounding of hoofs on the smooth asphalt quickened. They flew along at a pace that forbade conversation, even had they been so minded. Neither was so minded.

Darkness had fallen when they drew up before the hospital. Mark descended painfully to help her down—a rather superfluous courtesy, since she was

better able to alight alone than was he. "You're in good time, I hope?"

"Oh, yes. Thank you for the ride."

They exchanged a conventional hand clasp. She moved toward the steps leading to the hospital door. He began to climb back into the trap.

But the restive horses started too soon, while he was balanced on the little mounting step. His foot was dislodged. He would have fallen, perhaps been dragged, had Kazia not sprung forward, and catching the reins, brought the horses sharply to a stop.

"You are hurt?"

"No," he lied through set teeth, as he pulled himself up to the seat. His hip, in fact, had received an excruciating wrench. "I'm a little awkward. This is one of the things I can't get quite used to."

"I supposed it was only temporary."

He shook his head briefly, as though the topic were distasteful.

"Another—you probably won't believe this—is an existence that continually requires little cruelties of one. Big ones, too, sometimes."

"You say—*requires*?"

"At least, encourages. But I," he smiled unpleasantly, "am subject to regrets. And equally unprofitable impulses. Of course," with obvious irony, "this is very interesting to you."

She was standing between two balustrade lamps. In their bright glow he saw her cool impersonal regard change, become questioning. And the dark shadow again—as though she had seen and known

to the full the cruelties whereof he spoke. Her lips parted. But no words fell. With an odd little gesture of repression she turned and slowly mounted the stairs. At the top she paused for an instant.

"Good night," she repeated. "And thank you again."

He dined alone at his club that night. The events of the day had left him depressed and strangely restless and with a strong distaste for companionship. To escape an approaching group of loungers, he rose hastily, leaving his cigar half finished, and went home.

The drawing-room was brightly lighted and from within came to him a medley of gay voices; Unity had surrounded herself with her kind. He entered quietly by a side door and, undetected, stole up-stairs to his own room. He felt no guilt in thus shirking the rôle of host; Unity's guests, he knew, happy in their chit-chat, their cards and their flirtations, would be glad to be spared the presence of one with whom they had nothing in common.

Hours later a burst of laughter from departing guests aroused him from his long reverie. He looked at the clock—it was past midnight.

"And I thought I had forgotten how to dream. But what a woman! What a woman to have made the fight with! *She* would care—and not for the loot. . . . I'd better quit thinking of her."

He could not know that at the same hour the woman was sitting at her hospital window, looking

out into the murky night and seeing a procession of memories stalk forth from the tomb. There was no lack of charity now. There had been no lack. Her cool composure had been but a mask for an inward tremor such as she had believed she could not know again. The man who had filched her girlish heart only to give it back had returned into her life, and he, too, was a promise fulfilled. His very frailty and disability, while forbidding harsh judgments, threw a halo around him for her. The spirit and courage that had withstood trials before which stronger succumbed had not faltered until a seat among the masters had been won.

Other memories, too, in which he had had no part and for which time had seemed to be finding an anodyne, revived and burned. There was no one to see. The will that had sternly repressed such futilities as regrets relaxed. The guise of self-reliance that had so impressed the successful man slipped away. The somber shadow—of hopeless penitence—fell upon her.

CHAPTER XVII

FANNED INTO FLAME

"I'D BETTER quit thinking of her," Mark had said.

A virtuous and a wise resolution, forsooth! And one strangely hard to keep. The thought—of a woman of the people, dwelling in a fine strong body whose splendid perfection the toil of the people could not diminish, whose flame could not quench—never withdrew entirely, at most retired into ambush whence to spring out upon him at unguarded moments, with ever increasing potency to stir his jaded imagination. He could not honestly have claimed a vigorous resistance to its assaults upon his interest. There was a peculiar luxurious pleasure, such as he had not known since budding youth, in turning aside from the hard, serious, disappointing routine to contemplate the breathlessly romantic possibilities the thought of her evoked, to try to solve the mystery of her reappearance in a plane, not exalted surely, but vastly superior to that in which he remembered her, to ponder what temper of woman lay beneath her composed exterior, to speculate upon the men she must have attracted. It was at this point that he generally broke

off, contemptuously indicting himself as an arrant fool.

"What have I to do with women?" he would demand of himself. "Or women with me? Me, a broken-down cripple!" A pertinent reflection which, however, did not make for content.

He had much time and equal need for the distraction of such thoughts. Attainment of the partnership had indeed proved to be the climax of his career with the Quinby company. Followed quickly the long imminent collapse. There was no specific ailment, save a heavy stubborn cough and the constant ache in his injured hip, which were really symptoms. It was rather a general failure of his powers. He was no longer able to whip flagging energies to the day's tasks. The cool, clear, incisive brain that could grasp a multitude of details and yet not lose sight of result and purpose had become cloudy, vacillating and wandering, a poor tool for the direction of a huge, intricately organized plant operating under tremendous pressure. He was subject to attacks of profound melancholy. He could not sleep without the aid of drugs. Worst of all, the will to endure, to mock pain and weakness, had broken.

"What's the matter with me?" he demanded of his physician.

"Burnt out," was the succinct reply.

"What can I do?"

"Nothing. And quit taking drugs."

"But," habit protested, "I can't do nothing."

"It's your life," interrupted the doctor. "But you've consulted me and I propose to earn the stiff fee I'll charge you. Drop everything, go to the country or to the end of the earth—personally, I'd advise the end of the earth, because it's farthest away and newest to you. Forget work, play a while."

Mark shook his head gloomily. "I've forgotten how to play. I've been working too long."

"Well, you've got to learn to play over again. You'll find there are a good many important and interesting things you've forgotten or overlooked while you've been trying to make a cheap hero out of yourself."

"We'll assume that. How long must I play—as you call it?"

"For months, maybe for years, maybe always. How can I tell what damage has been done until you try the cure?"

"A loafer for months, maybe for years, maybe the rest of my life! Pleasant outlook!"

"You complain?" The doctor was a vigorous gentleman who had no fear of his patients. "You ought to be down on your marrow-bones thanking God you're a rich man and can afford the cure. I see hundreds of poor men in your state, and they have to plug along until the last ember is dead."

Mark asked and received from the directors a six months' vacation. But, although he formulated no reason, he did not at once leave the city. When the weather permitted he filled in the hours by

driving through the parks. They were long tedious hours; as drearily empty as he had forecasted. The nights, when he lay sleepless, fighting an incipient craving, were longer and drearier. Thus it was that he had leisure to think of Kazia Whiting, though at some loss to explain why the reappearance of one whom in his receded youth he had treated badly should command so much of his interest.

Nor did he admit a design when his drives took him almost daily past the Todd Hospital. Nevertheless the sight of that institution was enough to evoke a faint thrill of excitement not to be laid to its barrack-like architecture, followed by a more emphatic disappointment as the neighborhood was left behind. One afternoon Kazia, in company with another young woman, emerged from the grounds as he was passing and gave him a cool impersonal nod. He guessed that it was her recreation hour and marked the time. The quick leaping interest should have been a warning to him. Perhaps it was, for:

"I'm making a fool of myself," he growled.
"What do I know of this woman?"

On the third day thereafter, at the same hour, he passed the hospital. This time Kazia appeared alone. She gave him again the cool impersonal nod and would have passed on. But he drew the horses up sharply and called: "Kazia!"

She paused, hesitated a moment, then went over to the curb. Both somber shadow and chill indif-

ference, he observed with delight, were absent from her face, replaced by a light he did not have time to analyze but supposed might be secret mirth; he wondered if she, too, found something ridiculous in this attempt to renew an old acquaintance. But the light, whatever it was, vanished as she scanned his haggard face.

"Will you drive with me for a while?"

"I ought to walk," she answered.

"Please, Kazia." It did not seem absurd to him that he pleaded.

She hesitated again, then—

"Yes," she said.

He would have alighted to help her to the seat, but she forestalled him.

"Don't get out." And she was beside him.

He touched the horses with his whip and they sprang forward.

"You aren't well," she said abruptly.

And he, ascribing to that fact her unexpected compliance, was at the moment almost glad of his disability.

"Is it obvious? I believe I'm not. In fact, my doctor has ordered me to get out and play—I find it very hard work. That's why—that's *one* reason why—I asked you. I needed company. The circumstance," he smiled, "ought to appeal to you professionally."

"Nurses are notoriously hard-hearted."

"Yes? Then I can't work on your sympathies. On the whole, I'd rather have it so. You'll have

to admit it took courage to ask you to play with me, because—you'll admit again—you weren't exactly cordial the last time."

"What did you expect?"

"But I expected nothing," he retorted. "I didn't know you would be at Roman's. Why, I hadn't even heard of you for—I've been counting it up—fourteen years. That isn't gross flattery, is it? But, of course, you aren't the sort of woman that likes flattery. Are you?"

"Then you're not so sure, after all? But I do like it."

"Not really?"

"Really—and naturally. I even sometimes believe it. When discreetly tendered, of course."

"I must remember that." He chuckled. "Playing becomes distinctly easier. Isn't it lucky I happened along by the hospital just when I did?"

"But I thought—" She almost smiled. "I thought it was a habit."

"So you've seen me? Now you mention it, I may as well confess that this isn't luck, but the result of a very clever plot. I've been driving past the hospital almost every day in the sneaking hope that just this would occur."

"You say, a *sneaking* hope—?"

"You see," he confided, "I'm easily frightened. How could I know that I'd find you so—so beautifully human?—Are you preparing to snub me for that?"

"I am considering it." The smile was unmistak-

able now. "But I won't, because to-day is one of the days when I can't help being beautifully human. I'm so healthy that sometimes I just have to take a vacation from myself."

"And I'm so unhealthy that, though I'd like to, I can't give Truitt the slip for even an hour. He's a persistent beggar—as you may have noticed the last few weeks."

They laughed.

They had reached the park. He drew the horses down to a gentle trot, with now and again a brisk dash when an occasional landau or old-fashioned barouche drawn by sober plodding teams threatened his sense of being alone with her. They talked a great deal, always in gay strain, in conscious effort to be gay. It was not very clever talk—it was even awkward; theirs had not been the sunny inconsequent life that makes for nimble wits and tongues. But neither was a critical audience.

Under cover of their badinage he was trying to explain the strange fact that the chilling self-reliant woman, in her second reappearance, had become softly feminine, winsome, even intimate. There might have been no cloud over their past. Equally strange but not open to question was his pleasure in the fact.

It was a clear afternoon, beautiful with the mellow radiance of autumn sunshine. But the wind that swept sky and air clean was crisp and penetrating. To her, superbly healthy, it gave only a rare tinge of color that enhanced her charm, gave

the last needed softening touch. His wasted body, despite the heavy overcoat he wore, could not resist the chill breath. But, though he knew he would probably pay later for the exposure, he would not by so much as a minute curtail the hour.

"I haven't had so pleasant—it's a puny word, but let that go—so pleasant a time in years," he declared.

"I see," she laughed, "you have taken me at my word."

"But I mean it," he protested. "I'd like you to believe that I mean it."

He became grave.

"Since that day at Roman's I've been thinking a good deal of what we said—about my having harmed you. If regrets—but there's nothing so useless. That sort of thing isn't easily forgiven, is it?"

"Oh, very easily."

"You are thinking that I give too much significance to our little affair. I do not—"

"No, I mean I have never blamed you. Of course, we were too young for it to have any lasting significance. And, if I remember aright, I invited it—and so put you in what must have seemed a very tragic quandary at the time." The most critical ear could have discerned nothing ungenuine in her rippling laugh.

"It did," he answered. "But you didn't invite it. You weren't the sort of girl that needed to invite it—you aren't that sort of woman now!" Eyes,

no less than tongue, were eloquent of his admiration; but she was looking away. "But most women wouldn't be so ready to forgive. They would remember only hurt vanity. I'm at your feet for your charity. I've seen little of it in my life."

"Have you looked for it?"

"No. Nor had it. Nor valued it—until now."

"And now?"

"Why now I—need it."

Somehow the confession, an unconsidered remark that, however, had the ring of sincerity impulsive sayings are apt to have, seemed to establish even more firmly their intimacy. It nerved him to his next remark.

"Kazia, don't you think you could tell me what has happened to you during all these years?"

"It wouldn't be interesting."

"But it would," he insisted. "In the first place, it is your story. Which is enough. In the second, I left you an ignorant—no, not that either—an unschooled little Hunky girl. Now I find you a fine cultured woman, with an air—do you know it?—that not many women I know have, capable, I'm sure, since you always were that, and evidently educated. That makes it the story of success, which is always interesting."

"You draw on your imagination, I'm afraid. You would hardly look for success in a nurse."

"But that's exactly where I am looking for it." He assumed a commanding air. "On with the tale!"

She shrugged her shoulders and was silent. A quarter of a mile spun by.

"You'll be disappointed," she began abruptly, "because there isn't much and it's commonplace enough. I married Jim and lived with him a year. Then I left him. Not because he wasn't kind—he was, in his rough way. But he was shiftless and he drank too much. He had no ambition and—I wasn't happy with him, so I left him, though I knew it hurt him."

"A woman can do that," he interrupted quickly.

"Some women do it, you mean. I've always been ashamed, though I never went back to him. Later, I got a divorce. I went to live with Uncle Roman, but Piotr, who had hated Jim, made it so unpleasant I had to leave. He hated me, too, I think."

"Or loved you, in Piotr's peculiar fashion. But go on."

"After a while I found work in a tobacco factory, rolling cigars. Not the kind you smoke, but cheap vile things. It—it wasn't nice."

"I've heard of those holes," he muttered. "You there—why—"

"I was one of many," she went on. "In two years I was sick and in the hospital, a heavenly place where there was ventilation and nothing to do and good things to eat. I used to pray I'd never get well." She paused, staring fixedly ahead, ineffable sadness in her eyes. He thought she was seeing again in memory the horror of the filthy disease-breeding shop,

"There isn't much more. I didn't have to leave the hospital. One of the internes took an interest. He had influence and helped me to register as a nurse. I've a knack for surgical work, and since I passed my examination, I've always had cases. For the rest, I'm not educated. I've merely read a little, here and there, as I've had time.

"That's all and not what you seemed to expect. Just cruel selfishness in the beginning and a little luck afterward. Which is not the success you worship."

"But I see more than that. I read between the lines." Long afterward, recalling this scene, he remembered her quick questioning glance, but then he gave it no thought. "I see the courage to make a fight, the will to rise and being equal to the opportunity when it came. And I've heard that the really charitable are never so to themselves."

"Oh, if you will—" She broke off with a shrug. "Let us talk of something else."

"But I think," he insisted, "you make too much of leaving your husband. Surely a woman has the right to look out for her own happiness and—"

"It isn't that," she interrupted. "It—" She broke off again. The pretty color had left her face and her hands were folded tightly in her lap. "It's the time in the factory. I can't forget it. It was horrible. Often it killed. It made the girls willing to pay any price to escape. Sometimes I can't seem to realize it's ended for me."

"Ah! I can understand that. Often I have

awakened in the night, all in a tremble because I've dreamed I was back in the mills. I've been afraid to go to sleep again. But that is the price of success."

"Ah! Your success—always success!" She turned on him almost fiercely. "But that isn't the price. It's the glory, because to endure is to be strong. The price—it's what we do and become to escape. It's the hardening, the concessions, the loss of sympathy and gentleness, of the things that make a woman—I'm not fine, as you said. No woman is who has had to fight for a living—alone."

They were silent for many minutes. He was trying to picture the horror that must have eaten into this woman's soul, since the memory of it after years could evoke her passionate cry. It hurt him to look on that picture.

He saw now—or rather felt—that she was right, that there was a lack. She was not like the protected women he knew. For the stronger qualities, the capacity to achieve, the freedom to cry out what she felt, as for the right to live, she had paid as she had said, in the little graces of manner and speech, in the feminine soft pliancy and concealments. That, too, hurt him—hurt strangely. A sad tenderness for her welled up within him. He wished he could restore to her the woman's estate; or give it originally, for she had never really had it.

Something else he saw. Her quick acceptance of his invitation, the unexpected breach of her indifference, were not the result of a passing whim.

The chance meeting at Roman's must have meant something to her. During the intervening weeks she, too, must have been thinking and wondering. Not to a stranger or to a one-time lover who had been given a stranger's place outside her heart could she have uttered the cry still quivering in his ears. That could mean only that with her one spark of their hot youthful passion had not died, but had lain smoldering, unquenchable by time or wrong or suffering, perhaps needing but a breath to burst into flame. And with him!

The thought shook him, then filled him with a riotous reckless joy. . . . He remembered that once he had thought of Kazia, the girl, as having a genius for loving. Her physical promise had been fulfilled. Could he believe that genius had shriveled? What mattered her lacks! It was not among the soft protected women one sought or found the great whole passions.

"Steady!" he cried warningly to himself. "Am I a hot-blooded boy of twenty or a man whose cup is empty?"

But when at length he broke the silence, his voice was a caress. "I wouldn't have you different. What you've lost is nothing compared with what you've gained."

She turned her head slowly toward him. For a long minute their eyes held. Then with one accord they looked away. Not the heart of a boy of twenty could have beaten more violently. Silence fell upon them once more.

As they drove on, the silence became awkward, self-conscious. Neither seemed able to break it.

Rounding a curve in the tortuous driveway, they met a landau, a beautifully enameled affair drawn by high-stepping horses in elaborate silver-mounted harness. In it sat two women. They bowed to him, the younger with a pointed smile.

Kazia heard him mutter, "I had forgotten!"

With a quick angry movement he brought his whip down on the horses' flanks. The sensitive animals, unused to such treatment, dashed madly forward. When he had them under control again, she turned to him.

"Who was she?"

"The older? That was Mrs. Thomas Henley, of whom you may have heard."

"Yes? But I meant the other."

"That," he answered in a dry constrained voice, "was Mrs. Mark Truitt."

After a little, "Ah!" she breathed. "She is lovely."

"That makes it unanimous," he said shortly.

It had ceased to be the pleasantest time he had had in years. A heavy cold cloud had settled upon their intimacy. Why dream of the possibility of a mighty primitive passion! It was not possible. It was but of a piece with the incompleteness of all his achievements and desires. The splendid vital woman, between whom and him lay an inflaming memory, whose presence could now, as in his youth, weave a spell about him, was out of his reach.

. . . But it was a characteristic of the man to want most the things farthest away, the things forbidden.

"We've gone far enough," she said. True words, however she meant them! "And it is getting too cold for you. Let us turn back."

He made no protest.

He swung the team around and drove toward the hospital; at a reckless pace, that he might not have to talk. He had no wish for commonplace speech with her. From other speech the habit of self-repression saved him.

But not wholly. For as they were nearing the hospital, he drew the horses down to a soberer gait.

"When," he asked, "will you drive with me again?"

"Not again."

He had known, even before she spoke, what her answer would be. And he knew—so had she given it—that it was irrevocable.

"I wonder why you came to-day."

"I'd been thinking of you. And I was—curious. To see what sort of man you had become."

They swung into the hospital grounds and up to the entrance. Over her protest he descended to help her to the ground. He took a queer pleasure in the pain the needless little service gave him.

He sought her eyes. "Was it only curiosity, Kazia?"

Her answer was not in words. Slowly she mounted the stairs to the doorway, and turning, looked

steadily down upon him. Her face was white, but her eyes were lustrous—and unspeakably sad.

“Kazia—”

“Good-by.”

The door clanged behind her. Through it he watched the strong supple figure pass down the corridor, and so out of his sight.

He had had the answer he wanted. But he received it with a heart heavy as lead. He wanted her as he had desired nothing since life began. And he could only stand and, helpless, see her leave him.

CHAPTER XVIII

SUNDERED BONDS

DINNER, on the rare occasions when the Truitts dined together and alone, was marked by a careful formality that was but a thin disguise for their mutual dislike. At no other time, save by hastily cured accident, were they apt to confront each other. The quarrel of the night of their first invitation to Henley's house had never been healed. Each had gone a separate way, ignoring as far as possible the other's existence.

With Unity the dislike had been genuine. She believed that when her easy husband had so suddenly and definitely put an end to her supremacy, she had been robbed of a right that she, a woman and therefore a superior finer being, should enjoy. Fear, of him and of what the man she now perceived him to be might do if unduly provoked, kept dislike alive and hot.

With him it had been rather contempt for her airs and vanities, for the uselessness to which, even in a woman, he could not become reconciled. But on this night it was both contempt and a rising bitter resentment that heightened the emotional tumult.

She chose this hour to lay aside the cold, somewhat thetic hauteur it was her wont to assume before him. In its stead she donned an air of triumph, of smiling aggressiveness that he was quick to connect with their meeting in the park. She criticized the knot of his necktie. Several times she contradicted him wantonly. He saw in it only the small vindictiveness of a silly woman, but resentment was making contemptuous tolerance of her pettiness impossible.

"You're trying to resurrect an ancient habit," he warned her. "It's very dead, I assure you."

His apparent coldness deceived her. She answered with a significant smile. "Oh, if it is a question of habits—!" She concluded with a disdainful shrug.

He suppressed a retort. Just then a servant entered, bringing the fruit. He waited until they were alone again, then rose abruptly and left the room.

Unity, too, rose and, following, overtook him in the firelit drawing-room.

"You are rude. I wish to speak with you."

"I'm going up to my study."

"You're supposed to have given up work, I believe."

"I wish to be alone."

"Now, perhaps. You weren't alone this afternoon in the park."

"I didn't want to be then. What is that to you?"

"A wife has some right to consideration, I think."

"A wife—yes. You'll hardly claim the title."

"Do you deny it to me?"

"A wife has something to give her husband. But you— What is it you have to say? By your manner I judge you think it important."

"It is." She settled herself slowly and comfortably in a chair, carefully arranged her skirt and looked up at him with a palpably assumed smile. "It is. You're too ill to work, but it seems not too ill to go driving in the park with striking looking women."

With an effort he kept his voice cold. "And you object, is that it?"

"I do."

"Very well. You've registered your protest. Is that all?"

"No, it is not." She leaned sharply forward, forgetting to pose and to smile, the delicate prettiness of face eclipsed by a cloud of vixenish temper. "It is not. I have some self-respect and regard for our position, if you haven't. Do you suppose a husband means nothing to me but a name?"

He glanced hesitatingly toward the door, meditating retreat. Then, with a grim tightening of his lips, he returned his gaze to her.

"You really want an answer? Then, I had supposed a husband means to you a name—and a check-book. With inexhaustible leaves."

"So you begrudge me the money I spend! You grow—"

"Your expense account, fully met, is the best answer to that, I think."

"But I want more than money. Do you think a little money—a little paltry money—can repay me for your neglect and selfishness?"

"So you scorn money? It's news to me. But I think you've nothing to complain of."

"Nothing!" she cried. "Is it nothing that I have to go everywhere alone, always having to listen to whispers behind my back of my husband's foolish attempts to play the man about town? You see, you couldn't keep your escapade of last year from me. Or that you've turned the old set against me by cheating poor Timothy Woodhouse out of his last property?"

He winced and flushed painfully at that. She saw and believed she had pierced his armor. She rose again, that she might deliver her final thrust most effectively.

"Do you call it nothing that you, who have no time or thought to spare your wife, brazenly flaunt your women in public, on the streets and in the parks, for all the city to see and gossip about?"

He was standing rigid, both hands gripping his cane, his gaze fixed unwaveringly on her. The tightened lips had become the merest line.

"If you refer to Mrs. Whiting," he began at last steadily, "you will please use more respectful terms."

"You reprove me on her account! This," she

cried tragically, "this is too much. I suppose this Mrs. Whiting—if that's her name—is your mistress—perhaps I should say, your latest mistress."

"Why, you—"

The storm burst, choking back speech, but finding an outlet through his eyes. He reached out swiftly and caught her hand in a cruel clutch, crushing the soft useless member until her rings bit into the flesh and she cried out in pain.

"Let me go," she gasped. "You're hurting me."

He did not heed. . . . Bitter thoughts of her burned; resentment for the years when she had played upon his desire, upon his wistful longing for amiable companionship and then upon his loyalty to their contract; for the crass bully's stupidity with which she, intelligent in other things, had approached their relation; for her refusal to share his life or to create a common life, with which she had recompensed his early passion, feeble counterpart of love though it had been. Most bitter of all was the thought of the love between which and him she stood a hopeless barrier. He had, even in his anger, no exalted notion of his part in their relation; but at least he had sought, as long as he could in hope, to make it decent and beautiful, a refuge from the ugly strife against which a secret part of him, as tenacious of existence as was his desire, had never ceased to mutter its futile protest. To her both he and their relation had been but a means to an end. And what an end!

He released her and sank back into a chair. She tried to draw herself up haughtily.

"So you stoop to—"

"Don't be ridiculous," he snarled. "I stoop to anything these days. Just now I'm trying to think out what you and I are going to do. Sit down and quit playing the tragedy queen."

She hesitated, then obeyed. He closed his eyes and leaned back. The storm spent itself, leaving him weak and heartsick. After many minutes he looked up to her.

"I'm not very proud of this scene. You may take that as an apology."

"What are apologies worth?" she answered coldly.

"Nothing, of course. But I want you to know—I'm ashamed." He paused, wistfully regarding the loveliness so prodigal in promise. "I think we've come to the end of our chapter, Unity. But I'll give you—*us*—one more chance."

"You'd think I were a criminal!"

"We both are—but let that go. Heretofore you've made our life. And you've failed. Since our first month we've never been really happy, at least in each other. Now let me choose. Let's go away somewhere—"

"To New York or abroad?"

"Not to New York or abroad. To Bethel or some place where we can live a quiet, decent, natural life. Let us begin over again and try to re-

cover what we've lost—or rather what we never had."

"You are absurd!"

"Is it absurd for a man to ask his wife—you've claimed the title—to share the life he wants and needs?"

"You forget to consider what *I* would have from such an arrangement."

"You would have me."

She answered with a contemptuous shrug. "I will do nothing so silly. You ask too much."

"Ah! You're franker than I thought you could be. I'm glad you're frank." He rose, looking curiously down at her. "If you look back, you'll find I've never asked you anything until now. I've been content to take—at least, I've taken—only what it suited your whims to give me. And you've given exactly nothing. Nothing more, anyhow, than the street woman would give—not so much, because she would sometimes consult my wishes and interest, if only for business reasons. You've taken me, my acquiescence and my contributions for granted."

"And what," she flung back, "have you given me?"

"From another woman that might be a crushing retort. I've given you very little. But, as it happens, it's been all you wanted. You wouldn't take, you never wanted, the only worth while thing I had to give." He paused again, his manner hardening. "However, all that is ended. I go away to-morrow

morning. I don't think I shall ever see you again."

Even then he might have relented, if she had given him excuse. For beneath his longing to be free of the incubus of a woman with whom he had nothing in common, beneath even the love whose sudden dazing revelation had given freedom a hundredfold value, was a sense of cowardice in seeking to escape the just penalty of his folly and failure. But she gave him no excuse.

"You're asking for a divorce?"

"Yes."

"I suppose," she sneered, "you want to marry that woman, your mistress."

He held himself under rigid self-control. "She isn't my mistress, though I love her. She was the girl I gave up years ago out of loyalty to you."

There was nothing lovely about Unity Truitt just then.

"And now you want to renew the broken romance. Very pretty! But," she laughed in vindictive pleasure in her fancied ability to thwart his desire, "you shan't have her. I don't choose to be a divorced woman. And I know you can't get a divorce without my consent."

"I think you will consent," he said quietly.

"I will not. I don't choose—"

"The choice is with you, of course. But you must understand it. You're through with me in any case. But if you consent to the divorce, I'll make a settlement that will satisfy you. If not, I will make only the allowance I think you've earned."

She went pale at that, the one threat which could reach her. "Why," she gasped, "you couldn't do that. Even you couldn't be so brutal—"

"Choose."

"But you *couldn't*. You—I must have time to think—"

"You must choose now." He was inflexible.

She sat transfixed, beginning to comprehend the reality of his purpose. Her confidence suddenly melted. Fear shone in her eyes. She rose, and with a piteous pleading gesture, too frightened to be conscious of her hypocrisy, she went to him.

"Why, Mark—Mark, dear! You can't mean that. You couldn't cast me off like this. Why, we're husband and wife and—I know I haven't been fair to you, but I can't let you go. Let me make up this last year to you. Let us go away, as you say, and begin over. We *can* be happy—"

The stammering incoherent cry halted, silenced by the unrelenting quality of his steady eyes. The outstretched hands fell limply to her sides. She shrank back a step from him.

"I believe—you do—mean it."

"I'm waiting for your choice."

After a little it came, gaspingly.

"I have no choice. I—I must consent."

He turned away and without another word or glance for her, limped heavily out of the room.

CHAPTER XIX

BOND THOUGH FREE

THE Truitt divorce sensation had reached and passed its height.

One day, when the decree was scarcely two weeks old, a man alighted from an incoming express train. He did not look like a roué or the villain of a famous scandal; he himself did not know that he had been heralded in such a rôle. His doctor would hardly have recognized him. He was still thin and the cane had not been discarded, but he was clear-eyed and healthily bronzed and the limp was far less noticeable than at any time since the accident.

Six months he had spent in the northern wilderness, living in the open, sleeping under the stars, with no company but his own thoughts and a taciturn half-breed Indian. But they had not been lonely months, nor did he think them wasted. For they had brought him to what he was pleased to call a new birth.

Again and again he had passed in review the events of his career, scrutinizing them closely for the mistakes that had led to his disappointment; for a disappointment, a huge failure as a source of happiness, his scheme of existence admittedly had

been. He found many such mistakes. Chief of all was the very plan, his theory of happiness. He had believed that by the successful matching of wit and strength and courage against those of his fellows was that coveted treasure to be won. Naturally, he thought now, the scheme had failed; he had not deserved to win; for strife is necessarily cruel and the triumph of the victor is made up of the miseries of the many conquered. Therefore, he discarded that theory. Life, the battle-field, he saw only as an ugly shambles, without splendor, without power to thrill.

But for the discarded theory he needed a substitute. And so he turned to the other pole. Since strife had failed, therefore, peace held the secret—a life passed in amity with his fellows, taking from them nothing they did not willingly give, even sharing with them what he had. It was a beautiful theory—to a man whose appetite for battling had died—seen in the winter starlight or across stretches of gleaming snow. It is true, it was more than a little vague. How and where were questions he left trustingly to the future. Surely somehow, somewhere he could find an empty niche into which he would fit neatly, without friction. It would be his business to seek out that niche.

He praised heaven that he was free to make the search, calmly and wisely, relieved of the hard necessity for struggle—and in company with the woman whom his first task was to make his. When did

the conscious seeker after happiness ever leave love out of the account?

| Such a woman as he painted up there in the wilderness! Strong and simple and sure, so big that neither time nor injury could wholly kill her love; able to survive the strife, but needing peace as he needed it—he remembered and longed to drive away the somber shadow that sometimes darkened her eyes. He had no doubt of her, or that all barriers between them should be thrown down. He was in company with her already; that is why the months alone were not lonely. Rhythmical dip of paddle, the splashing of wavelets against his canoe, were but the accompaniment to the love chant ever in his heart. The rising tempest sang of rapturous matings, fulfilment of a holy law.

| A futile philosophy, a mad visioning, both induced by recovered health and the spell of the untainted wilds. But he was soon to learn what he had left out of the account.

The first news of the Truitts' separation had evoked scant interest from the gossips. But as the time set for the trial approached it began to be whispered about that more than the usual stale story of domestic disagreement lay behind the affair. The whisper became an audible chorus. It was a dull season in a year when no important election impended, there was a dearth of spicy news; the newspapers avidly seized this chance to give flavor to their columns. From some source, which

might have been identified as Unity's lawyer, reporters were furnished material for innumerable suggestive rumors. Vague but deftly worded innuendoes of Truitt's cruel treatment of his wife appeared, of his sly profligacy, of the one strikingly handsome woman who had captivated his fancy and whom it was supposed he would marry after the divorce. The trial with its fuller disclosures was hungrily awaited by a community whose heritage of Puritanism but whetted its appetite for the salacity it self-righteously condemned.

Unity suffered nothing at the hands of gossip. She was painted as a rarely lovely woman to whom the notoriety was torture, but who bore up under it with the sweet courage of long suffering innocence. Her social triumphs were recalled, her charitable activities in St. Swithin's emphasized. She became a sort of heroine. The story most widely played up—for its touching pathos—of her romantic devotion to her husband during his early struggles, rewarded by brutal neglect when he had achieved affluence, wrung tears from the sentimental multitude.

It was a clever campaign. The thing grew, spread beyond the limits of the city. It became the scandal of the hour, a racy tidbit to add zest to the nation's breakfast. From Truitt, who had completely disappeared, came no denial. His flight and silence were taken as an admission of guilt.

At the trial, to be sure, the testimony was a distinct disappointment. It proved merely common-

place desertion and touched but lightly on only one short-lived period of dissipation during which Truitt, at certain midnight suppers, had shared with other men the more or less interesting company of sundry nameless women. The public, deprived of the scandal for which its mouth had been watering, decided that Mrs. Truitt had been overly magnanimous in thus sparing her husband and let its heated imagination supply the lacking details. Truitt entered no defense and a decree was quickly handed down. Mrs. Truitt at once sailed for Europe.

He hailed a cab and gave the name of a club that to cabby brought visions of a liberal tip. In a few minutes the destination was reached and the passenger descended to the pavement. At that moment a woman, whom he recognized as one of Unity's familiars, approached. He lifted his hat and bowed. She looked squarely at him and passed on without greeting. Red surged into his cheeks.

"Cut!" he muttered. "I suppose Unity's given her version of our smash-up. Unity would."

He paid his fare and entered the portals from which no rich man had ever been excluded. At the desk a well dressed and usually very polite young clerk so far forgot himself as to look his amazement.

"Mr. Truitt! I supposed you were out of town. I thought—" He stopped in confusion, remembering that it was no part of his business to think.

Mark looked hard at him. "You thought?"

"I thought you were out of town," stammered the clerk.

"I was. And now I'm back," Mark answered dryly. "So I think I'll arrange for rooms here indefinitely."

Nor was this all of the city's greeting to the returned wanderer. The rooms arranged for, he turned away from the desk, to come face to face with a man whom he had used to like and who, he had reason to believe, had not been without interest in him.

"Why, hello, Baker!" Mark held out a friendly hand, with a genial smile that was part of his new resolve.

Baker took the hand, but released it quickly. "Ah! How are you, Truitt?"

"Bully. Just back from a long stay in the woods. Dine here with me to-night, won't you?"

"Thanks, no. I'm probably not dining here. Excuse me. Some men I must see—"

Baker broke hastily away, passed a few words with a near-by group and went out. The ruse was obvious. Mark, feeling as though he had received a blow in the face, stared after the retreating figure. The genial smile faded. Then he went to the rooms he had engaged. Passing the group that had helped out Baker's ruse, he was conscious of their furtive curious glances.

Arrived in his rooms, his first act was to have back newspaper files sent up to him. For two hours he read how, while he was winning back health in

the wilderness and planning a life of amity with his fellows, his name had been bandied about on the tongues of slander and gossip. As he read in the light of what had just happened the amazing accumulation of suggested filth, only here and there brushing the outer edges of fact, utter bewilderment filled him. Shirley's brief communication, making mention of "some talk", received at the edge of the wilderness, had not prepared him for this.

"It's all a pack of dirty lies," he cried. "How could these men, who've seen me go in and out every day, believe it? What rotters they must be themselves to be able to believe it! By God! I'll—" He stopped, with a sudden feeling of dismay. "Why—why, I can do *nothing*."

It was true. He could do nothing. He could not buttonhole every man who looked coldly upon him or passed by on the other side, saying, "See here, my friend, I am not a profligate. I am not a wife-beater. All these rumors you've been accepting are merely by late wife's revenge for my refusal to continue a loveless unnatural relation that brought only unhappiness." And even if he could do that, what headway could he make in the destruction of the fabric that rumor, stimulated by a rejected woman's spite, had built and that needed but the magic of a hostile touch to grow like a weed after summer rains? He was helpless.

"Then I am not free! She has put a mark on me that a lifetime can't rub out. Must we pay forever for our mistakes? . . . ?"

He could not guess then how dearly he was to pay. But within a week he was learning with bewildering rapidity the extent of his last tribute to Unity's vanity. It did not amount quite to ostracism. But men—the big and fine, the Bakers, at least, for whose respect and companionship he had a healthy desire—studiously avoided him, or when a meeting could not be evaded, greeted him with a cold and distant formality that did not in the least suggest amity. An even sharper sting was the attention of another class of men for whom, having put his lips briefly to the cup they quaffed so copiously, he had nothing but disgust. Gilded youths, notable for their callow dissipations, sought him out, that they might boast of their acquaintance with the notorious Mark Truitt.

The first numbing shock over, the thing began to hurt him cruelly. Then he found himself hardening to the injustice of it, growing reckless, the springs of his new desire for amiable existence freezing. But he would not flee. He donned the mask the proud man, hurt, always assumes, making no outcry, jealously hiding his wound under a stoic indifference.

One evening, when his residence at the club had continued about three weeks, the affair came to a climax. Having just refused a cocktail insistently offered by a pimply youth who called him "Old man," he was entering the grill for dinner. At the sound of his name from a near-by group of diners, he halted involuntarily.

"That's all well enough," one of the diners was saying. "A club's a club and, of course, we have to allow a certain latitude. Still, when it becomes the refuge for a man so notorious we couldn't have him in our homes—" The speaker was checked by a warning kick.

Mark, sweeping the group with eyes from which the mask had momentarily fallen, met Baker's embarrassed gaze. With a contemptuous smile, he passed on to his own table and ordered a dinner which he made such show of eating as inward rage and pain allowed.

His coffee and cigar had just been brought when Baker crossed the room and stood by his table.

"Truitt—" he began uncertainly.

"Well?" Mark's upward glance was not welcoming.

"May I sit down for a minute?"

"Aren't you afraid of catching the plague?"

"I'm more afraid of being kicked for my impertinence."

"I understand," said Mark grimly, "I'm a pretty tough customer, but I don't commit assaults in public. Sit down."

Baker sat down, looking earnestly across the table at Mark. "Look here, Truitt. There are things on both sides of your fence I don't approve. But I particularly disapprove this Pharisee business. I felt like a cad when you caught us over there. I want to apologize for my part in it, though it wasn't a speaking part."

"All right." Mark lighted his cigar. "You've done your duty."

"But this is a little more than duty. I—" Baker hesitated. "Oh, hang it all! Some things become so painful only plain speech serves. You don't need to be told of the stories going around. Lately it's occurred to me that you've been letting us take them at face, without trying to contradict them. That's the thing I'd do myself—if I were in the right. But it can be carried to extremes. Have I your permission to say that the stories are—let us say, overdrawn?"

"You have not. Life's too short to enter into a contest with rumor."

"But your silence—"

"Is my affair," Mark answered gruffly, rising. "You may say to your meticulous friend that I'm about to resign from this club."

Baker, too, rose, looking at Mark keenly.

"Oh, come, Truitt," he began, "that's—"

But Mark cut him short. "At least it will save him and his sort the necessity of setting a precedent that would decimate the club. Good evening."

Henley, who had been out of the city when Mark returned, came back soon after the latter took up his residence in the hotel. Mark approached him with the inward shrinking that preceded every new meeting just then.

"You've picked up physically," Henley remarked after a cool handshake.

"Six months in the woods accounts for that."

"I'd think, if it was doing you so much good, you'd have stayed."

"In other words?"

"In other words," said Henley, "why did you come back *now?*"

Mark laughed hollowly. "I didn't know I'd become a notorious character."

"How, in heaven's name," Henley exclaimed, "did you let yourself get caught in a divorce court scandal? I'd have thought that you, of all men, if you had to play the fool, would at least have used finesse."

So even Henley believed the rumors!

"At any rate, no one but myself is hurt."

"That's not true. Every one who had anything to do with you is more or less hurt. The company is reflected on. I," Henley concluded with an air that declared the indictment to be complete and unanswerable, "I am besmirched, because we're known to be in so many things together."

"That," Mark returned coldly, "can be easily cured. We can wind up our affairs. And I'm ready to resign from the company."

"You can't cure the fact we *have* been together. And you can't resign. Are you going to add to the scandal by marrying that woman?"

"What woman?" Mark's voice was cool and steady.

"The one that turned your head and your wife was smart enough to discover."

"You've heard names, then?"

"No," growled Henley. "She's as mysterious as the rest of your didoes."

"As mythical, you mean," Mark answered in a voice that did not betray his relief. "There was no woman."

"What! You mean these stories aren't true?"

"You'd seen me almost every day for years. You might have guessed that."

"But last year—those women—"

"An experiment in idiocy—nothing worse. There were no women except at arm's length."

Henley surveyed him keenly. "Then how did these stories get out? But you needn't answer. I can guess. A woman is never clever except when she's up to mischief.

"However," he went on, "this puts a different face on the matter. As you say, I might have guessed the truth." This, for Henley, was abject apology.

Mark shook his head. "My resignation holds just the same."

"Are you going to let a little talk drive you out?" Henley demanded.

"It isn't that. I had decided before I knew of it. I'm tired of the scramble. I want—peace." Mark laughed discordantly. "And I'm getting it with a vengeance."

"As much as you'll ever get it," Henley returned promptly. "I know what you want. Who doesn't? Some time or other every man wants, or thinks he wants, peace. And if we had it, we'd want to die.

The only man who ever really, consistently wanted peace was hanged to the cross for preaching it." He paused, looking gravely at the troubled man before him. When he resumed, there was in his voice a gruff kindness probably no one had ever heard from Thomas Henley before. "You can't have it. There's no such thing as peace. How could there be, in a world of a million cross purposes? Everything a man has has value because some one else wants it. Everything he would do hurts another and that other is bound to resist. If you won what you call peace, you'd have to fight to keep it. There's no escape from the scramble."

"Very pretty—for you! You belong. But I—What's a man to do when he finds he's a misfit?"

"I told you once before—things *are*. Accept them, fit yourself to them, forget theories that lead nowhere. Pick out the thing you want most and fight until you get it. Then fight to keep it. Besides, you aren't a misfit. The trouble with you is, your strength is your greatest weakness—you've too much imagination. And you're not a well man yet. Go back to your woods until you're cured. Then you'll feel the itch to get into the scramble again and break a few heads."

But Henley the philosopher had done. He resumed his usual crisp manner.

"Moreover, you can't resign. The new agreement with the men comes up next year and the Quinby company faces the fight of its existence. We'll need every good head we've got. And if

that isn't enough, your withdrawal would leave me to fight Quinby alone. And—I made you, don't forget that. You've got what you wanted out of the company and me. You can't drop out easily now and shirk the responsibilities."

"You say, *can't?*"

"I say, *can't*. You've got a sense of obligation, haven't you?"

"If I have," said Mark grimly, "it's the last proof that I am a misfit."

CHAPTER XX

THE RED GLOW

HENLEY did not know what an impetus he had given with his "Pick out the thing you want most and fight until you get it."

Mark had not sought out Kazia. More than he would admit to himself, he had suffered during the weeks of injustice. Suffering had for the time dulled the longing for her. And behind that had been a proud reluctance to offer a love tainted by the tongues of scandal mongers. But now the hunger for a great love—born on an autumn evening of his youth when he had come upon a frail slip of a girl raptly gazing into the twilight, too much a part of him to be stifled even during the years of fierce blind struggle and disappointment—made itself felt again, downing pride. . . .

He called up the Todd Hospital, was told that Mrs. Whiting was not there, but could be reached at a certain number. He called up that number.

The response came in a low voice that even the telephone could not rob of its music for him. His heart leaped.

"Kazia!"

There was a pause, then the low voice came again: "Who is that?"

"This is Mark Truitt."

Another wait, so long that he thought the connection had been broken.

"Yes?"

"Is there any place I could meet you—by accident?"

"Is there any reason for an accident?"

"If you think not, there is none. . . . Are you still there?"

"Yes. . . . You can come here." She gave an address.

"This evening?"

"If you wish. . . . Good-by."

He alighted from a car that evening before a big but unpretentious apartment-house in one of the city's quieter neighborhoods. Three stories above the street he came to a door on which was her card. He knocked.

She opened the door. For many seconds they stood looking at each other, motionless, speechless.

. . . He broke the silence, in a strange greeting that spoke of itself.

"How often I remember you so—on the threshold!"

"I thought it was your step." The rich color surged before the invitation, lent meaning by his greeting. "Will you come in?"

He took her outstretched hand and stepped within. There was no act that night so small that it did not have its significance. The sound of the closing door sent a delicious tremor over him.

The quiet little sitting-room was a caress. He thought he had never found, even in the wilderness, so restful a place. He could not tell why he thought it different from other rooms he had known; there was nothing distinctive in the simple inexpensive furnishings or in the arrangement. Yet he did find it so, and surprisingly feminine.

"I suppose," he said aloud, when they were seated, "it's part of the mystery of personality."

"What is?"

"This room. It's the *homiest* I've ever been in."

"I'm glad you like it. I've had it for years. I suppose I oughtn't to keep it, because I don't get much good of it except in vacation. But I like to think of it as a place to come back to."

"You're on your vacation now?"

"Yes. I have a long one this year. I take only Doctor Wolf's cases now, and he is abroad for the summer. He ordered me to the seashore, because it had been a hard winter. But I preferred to come here, to play at keeping house—and to be by myself."

He leaned back in the chair to which she had assigned him and watched her under cover of their inconsequential chat. She, too, was surprisingly feminine that evening. She was sitting near the table, so that the cone of bright light cast by the shaded lamp fell on the sewing his coming had not long interrupted. The mellowed reflection on her face touched it with a softness, almost a beauty, he had not seen in her before. Her dress, of some

soft, pale blue stuff, added to the illusion of domesticity. He might have forgotten a former verdict as to the lack of fineness with which a woman struggling alone pays for survival, if he had not glanced at her hands. They were not pretty hands; scrupulous care could not make them so. Despite the daintiness of their task, they spoke of other and less feminine toil.

"You said," he picked up the thread of their conversation, "you wanted to be alone. Don't many people come here?"

"A few girls from the hospital, the janitor and the gas-meter man. And now you," she glanced up from her sewing, smiling, "for distinction."

"Why did you ask me to come here?"

"Because I didn't want you to think—" She paused uncertainly.

"That you believe all you may have heard of me lately. Thank you, Kazia. But I'd have expected you to say that."

Her eyes fell again to the sewing.

"Kazia," he asked directly, after a moment, "has any one ever connected you with my scandal?"

She looked up quickly again. "Why, no. How could they?"

"A mysterious woman has been mentioned. I've been afraid that every one I've had to do with might be smirched with me. I didn't want you—of all women—to be touched."

"Do you care so much about it all?"

"I wouldn't admit it to any one else. But I do care, Kazia."

She was silent, but the dark eyes were very gentle. The embroidery fell unnoticed to the floor. His glance fell upon the idle hands lying just within the rim of the light. She drew them quickly back into the shadow—then, as if ashamed of her shame, returned them to the revealing glare.

He took one of them in both of his. "Dear strong capable hand!" he murmured, and carried it to his lips for a lingering kiss.

The hand rested passive in his clasp, but when he looked up her face had gone white and in her eyes was again the shadow he once had seen there, the sadness unspeakable.

"Don't!" he cried. "It hurts me."

"Don't—what?"

"Don't look like that. As though all the sorrows of all women were speaking through your eyes."

Her lips curved in a sad little smile. "It is nothing so poetic as that."

"Ah! I know. It's the memory of that time in the shop. And the hurt I gave you. How could you forgive me—how could you forgive?"

"I suppose—I suppose, because I couldn't help it."

He leaned forward and drew her to him. He kissed her again and again. For a long minute he held her so, in silence. . . . Insidious moment, throwing open the gate that he might peer into a

golden realm such as even this Joseph had never dreamed!

"You haven't said it," he broke the silence.

"That I love you? Do I need—"

"No." He kissed her again. "Only I can't quite believe it yet. It's worth going through all the trials and disappointments and ugliness—to have this hour."

Much later—it did not seem long—he asked, "Kazia, when will you marry me?"

She did not answer for a long while. Then she gently pushed him away and spoke, slowly, as though all her strength were needed to force out each word.

"I can not marry you."

"You can not—" He stared at her, stunned.

She shook her head, mute.

"But why? You are free."

"I am free—under the law. But I can not."

"You love me, and yet—"

"I can not."

"But why?" he persisted. "You must have some reason." Then he aroused himself. "Though you may just as well forget it. Do you think," he cried, "I've found a real enduring love only to let it go?"

"I have a reason. I—" She broke off, looking away. Her hands clasped tightly in her lap, unclasped, then went out in a little appealing gesture as her eyes came back to him. "It isn't that I don't want to. I—I love you. But—oh, can't you understand? How could the love endure the little

trials and frictions, the nearness, the commonplace-
ness of every-day life together?"

"Ah! I wish you hadn't said that." He was staggered for the moment; to him her reason was not an empty one. But he went on firmly, "That wouldn't be true with us. It's never true where there is a real love to smooth the way. And you and I—we mustn't judge by our past, because we've never found the real love—until now."

"Yes, it is real. I think it is real."

From her wistful voice he thought he had shaken her. He pressed her hard. "Of course, it is. Then, don't you see—"

"No, if it is real, then I can't—I daren't—risk losing it. I haven't had much, ever, except this love—I mustn't lose it. And you don't know—I'm not fine and clever and cultured, like—like the women you've known. You'd see the lacks—" She was becoming incoherent. "Oh, don't try to persuade me. You only make it hard. I've been thinking of this—and of when you'd come—so long! And I *know*."

But he did try to persuade her. And longing lent him eloquence, as he pictured for her their love, triumphant over the starving years of separation, triumphing again over the vexatious problem of daily intimacy. He caught her to him once more, raining kisses on her hair and eyes and lips, trying to light a flame that should consume scruple and fear. She listened, her head thrown back, looking at him through half-closed eyes. As he saw the warm

light kindling under the lowered lids, he thought he was succeeding.

"You see!" he cried at the end. "Now aren't you persuaded?"

She could only shake her head again.

Slowly it came to him that she meant her refusal. He released her and drew back, so suddenly that she swayed and almost fell.

"Then it only means that you don't love me. If you did, you wouldn't count the risk."

"If you must believe that," she answered sadly, "you must. But it isn't true. If I could forget the risk, I shouldn't love you as I do."

He laughed harshly, and reaching for his hat, turned toward the door. The dreamed love had gone the way of his beautiful philosophy.

But at the door he looked back. She was standing as he had left her, pale, in her eyes both fear and the glow of the flame he had lighted. The hand, held out to him in involuntary gesture, was trembling visibly.

"Why—do you go?"

"But you said—"

"I didn't say—I wouldn't love you."

He laughed again. "What is love—by itself?"

"We could," pitifully she put forth the suggestion, "we could be friends."

"Friends! I'm no bloodless poet. I want a whole love."

Her hungering look was calling him, drawing him across the room to her. It bade him take her. He

took her, wonderingly, dazed by the seeming surrender. In his clasp she seemed to find a new courage.

"Then—then—I will give you a whole love—if you will take me as I am."

Even his voracious passion, demanding all, could turn aside at first from this proffered sacrifice.

"No, no!" he muttered. "Not that, Kazia! I've hurt you enough. And it wouldn't be a whole love. It couldn't be a lasting love. Love can't live except in the light of day."

"Love, if it is love, is its own light."

"But the risk you fear! It would be greater your way."

"This is my risk, not yours." Her arms encircled his neck, drawing his hot cheek down to hers. "And there is no one else. I am alone. No one would be hurt. It wouldn't—it *couldn't*—be a bigger love if given in the world's way. And it is all I can have, all I can give. Let me have it until—" She ended in a gasp that was almost a sob.

She had little need of eloquence or logic. The way to yielding had been paved when a man, returning with a half-born, ingenuously beautiful philosophy, had been greeted with a cold unearned contempt. Why not, since he could not escape from the old groove, take the thing he most wanted and as he could have it? . . . He sensed a mystery in her strange refusal—a mystery he feared to probe, lest it present a dilemma before which his courage must fail. . . . And in him, too, had been lighted a flame, consuming scruple and fear but not madness.

"Why not? . . . But there shall be no until! . . ."

Around them the city panted, to exist, to conquer, to play, to love, according to the primitive law of its various desire. Its myriad voices rose as always, uniting in a distant throbbing monotone. But the two in the little flat, if they caught the murmur, heard it only as music, the first joyous strains of the ancient idyl. And the man at least, adrift once more, forgot his lately learned lesson, that desire amuck must always have a victim.

CHAPTER XXI

ARCADY

HE WENT to sleep that night, fearing the awakening. But as he woke to the summons of the early summer sunshine filling his hotel room, the dreaded reaction did not come. He could think only with tenderness of the woman who had yielded all to him, of the love that did not haggle, with a sort of awe—and the query, Could he match it?

What he felt must have been closely akin to the love he called it, for he thought, too, of the obligation he had assumed when he took her all. But with fear: of the test to which their delicious madness must yet be put, the furtive encounters, the subterfuges they must contrive to deceive a world only too ready to scent just their situation. It was this fear that inspired the plan to flee with her to some spot where were no prying suspicious eyes.

He arose, and going to the telephone, called her number.

“Is it *you*?” He heard the eager catch in the low voice.

“Who else could it be?” He laughed. “Kazia, if you should happen to invite me to breakfast—”

“Oh, *will* you? Come soon. I—I am always waiting for you.”

But as he turned away from the telephone, something caught in his throat. "Poor Kazia!" he muttered. "We've cut out a big job for ourselves."

He did not have to knock at her door. While he was still mounting the last flight of stairs, it was thrown open and she stood awaiting him in the little entrance hall. When he took her in his close clasp, she put her hand to his forehead and looked searchingly into his eyes. He was glad that what she saw there contented her.

"Oh, I'm glad," she murmured from his shoulder, "I'm glad you called me up."

"Of course I did. How long did you think I could wait to hear your voice again?"

"I was afraid you wouldn't. If you hadn't—"

"But I did." He kissed her.

She led the way into the little sitting-room, now transformed into a breakfast-room. The morning radiance, softened a little by the creamy scrim curtains, fell upon a table all ready for his coming, with snowy linen and grapefruit reposing temptingly in beds of ice. Where the lamp had stood the night before was now a vase of cornflowers.

"All I could find. But I have hurried! My larder was low and I had to go out foraging."

"You shouldn't—"

"Did you think," she laughed in tremendous gaiety, "I could let my lord sit down to a lone woman's breakfast? And if you don't eat, I'll think you don't like it—or that you aren't happy." She became grave. "You *are* happy?"

"I am here," he smiled. "Look into your own heart for the answer, skeptic."

She did not raise the doubt again. In a mood that was almost merry they ate the breakfast she had prepared. She could not have complained of his appetite; never, he assured her, was omelet so light, toast so crisp and nicely browned or coffee so delicious. But she, fluttering back and forth between table and kitchenette in ministry to his anticipated wants, barely touched the viands.

"You just nibble," he accused her. "You're so busy waiting on me you don't have time to eat."

"But you've let your coffee get cold," she defended. "If I let you drink it you'd never have breakfast with me again."

"How," he groaned, "can I ever again endure the lonely hotel breakfast?"

Afterward, when the table had been cleared and the dishes washed—he helping with an awkwardness they found very comic—he broached his plan.

"Kazia, have you ever been in the woods?"

"No. But I remember you used to tell me of the hills you came from. I've always wanted to see them."

"Oh, yes, they're beautiful. But men live there. I meant clear out beyond the edge of things as you know them."

So he told her of the wilderness he had visited: of calm pellucid rivers that became noble lakes and then rushed madly down narrow rocky chutes; of vast stretches of untouched forest, pathless to all but

the wild things and the lonely, hardly less wild trapper; of its silences and ragings. She listened eagerly.

"Let's go there, Kazia."

The suggestion left her almost breathless for a moment. "Dare we?"

"Why not?"

"Why not?" she repeated slowly. "There would be nothing to fear up there, nothing to conceal. We could stay until I have to go back to work."

"Longer, if you like it. You needn't think of work."

"But I must," she smiled. "I must live—and I'm not a very rich woman."

"But I—"

"Hush!" She laid a silencing hand over his lips. "I am *giving* myself. . . . Let us go there. It will be something to remember. . . ."

It was easily arranged. He dropped a note to Henley which led the latter to believe that his counsel had been taken and Mark had gone away to let gossip run its course and die. Kazia had no explanations to make. She had but to buy the simple outfit recommended by Mark, pack a small trunk and close the apartment.

They met in Toronto and there took a train together. They alighted far to the north at a rude little lumber town where the smell of fresh-sawn lumber, mingled with the fragrance of balsam, swept down a long narrow lake. After one night in the home of a lumberjack to whose simple mind it never

occurred to question the status of his Yankee guests, they started up the lake by canoe with a guide who was to leave them when they had made a permanent camp.

From beginning to end their stay in the woods was without cloud or flaw. For five days they journeyed, always to the north. The narrow lake narrowed still further into a smooth clear river that wound in and out among ever wooded hills. They passed the region where the cruel ax had swung and scarred; the trees became bigger, the forest denser. Here and there they came to a rapids where the canoes had to be lifted and carried.

Her almost awed perception of each unfolding beauty touched him. She would spend hours in silence watching the forest glide past. A passing cloud mirrored in the river, a jumping bass, a startled deer quivering for the spring, the swoop of an eagle, were wonders to be seen with bated breath. White water was a never ending source of awe to her. She was first to hear its distant booming. While Mark and the guide made the portage, she would stand on the bank, careless of flying spray, gazing into the cascading torrent. Miles beyond she would still be listening for its dwindling song. Hers was no demonstrative pleasure; she caught the silent habit of the forest; when she spoke, it was almost in whispers. He remembered with a pang how little of beauty she must have had in her life and he resolved that no shadow should mar their flight into Arcady.

They came at length to another lake, a curving

basin set among hills that sloped steeply down to the water's edge. On a jutting point they found a deserted little cabin, some trapper's winter abode. There the journey ended. When the hut had been cleaned out, they dismissed the guide with orders to return every three weeks with fresh supplies. . . . They watched the canoe until it disappeared around the curve of the shore. Then they faced each other with shining eyes and clasped hands. "At last!" They were alone.

He cooked the supper that evening.

"It's my turn to play host. And if you don't eat," he mimicked, "I'll think you don't like my cooking—or that you aren't happy. I don't ask a question, for I read the answer from my own heart."

She laughed breathlessly.

The splendor of sunset faded from water and sky. From their fire a faint red-gold shimmer crept out into the lake. The breeze that had lapsed stirred again and the hush, a forest's tribute to the dying day, ended. The hilltops opposite, the last to resign the light, became a vague black mass against the starry vault.

From the woods behind them rose a wild unearthly scream. She started and moved a little closer to him.

"What is it?"

"Only a bobcat. Afraid?" He put a protecting arm around her.

"Not with you. Only awed. It's like love, all this—so big and so perfect, yet so indefinite—"

"I find love a very definite thing."

"To us it is indefinite, as though part of a plan so vast we can't see it, only feel it when it grips us. And so unconquerable."

"Men conquer the wilderness."

"Men defile it."

"And make it fruitful."

They were silent, both thinking of the one triumphant fruition denied their love.

"Yes," she whispered, after a little. "But love has many fruits. If it is forbidden to create new life, it can at least make fine and splendid the life that is. —Only love isn't a philosophy. It is you."

She turned her face to him. And from what the firelight revealed in her eyes he had to look away, startled and humbled.

"A man," he thought, "would have to be a god to deserve this."

But, being only a man, he crushed her to him in a very abandon of love-making.

Mindful of his resolve, he planned their days carefully, thinking only that they might be perfect for her. When he awoke he left her side so quietly as not to disturb her and pushed out in his canoe, as did his primitive fathers, to catch their breakfast. When he returned she was always awaiting him, hot fire ready for his catch. He taught her to swim, to become adept with the paddle, and imparted to her his considerable store of woodcraft. He played boyish pranks on her, that she might through laughter escape for a little from intensity. There was the

daily exploration either into the forest, where she could easily have outstripped his halting pace, or up one of the many streams that fed the lake. He sought to reveal each day some new mystery of the wilderness, and he watched over her jealously, lest some mischance overtake her. Best of all were the evenings when after supper they flung healthily tired bodies on the ground beside the fire and spun poetic philosophies of love—quite absurd, of course; in the cities they would never have found voice.

It was an unceasing wonder to him how she blended with her new surroundings. It seemed impossible that the splendid figure that moved so lightly and freely, the firm browned skin of face and neck and arms, the quick fearless eyes, were of a woman brought up in the cramping dwarfing city. He had often to remind himself that she was but one generation removed from peasants who, in their turn, were but little removed from the wild estate.

But peasant ancestry could not explain her courage and prodigality in love. For love—such as they had never known, could never know again, in the haunts of men—remained to both of them the supreme miracle of the wilderness. They loved as do the wild things, simply, directly, wholly and without satiety. They talked in the sum but little; often miles passed in silence unbroken save by the snapping of twigs underfoot or the lapping of water against their canoe, with no sign but a smile exchanged. Yet the sense of companionship, of intimate communion beyond words, was never dis-

turbed. When passion blazed, there was none of the madness of guilty lust, no thought of laws defied. Each day was a progression in happiness—a happiness so intense and solemn as to be almost akin to pain. And when they lay down for the night she slept with his arm for her pillow.

The man was swept out of himself, out of his groove of thought, as never before. His struggles and victories and disappointments receded; they seemed part of another existence. If he thought of them briefly at all, it was but as a price well paid for his freedom. He did not guess that the habit of thinking minutely for her happiness was slowly prying loose other and firmly fixed habits.

Two moons waxed and waned. The guide came with supplies, and again a second time. On his third appearance, the time set for their departure, Mark without consulting Kazia sent him back. She did not seem to notice the change in plan.

On the day when the guide should have returned again, he did not come. That evening a storm arose, such as rarely visits even those northern woods. Mark and Kazia were out on the lake for a lazy after-supper paddle, watching the masses of black clouds gather over the hills at the head of the lake. There was a rumble of distant thunder.

Suddenly, overtaking the mountainous vapor, appeared a lower plane of clouds, flying before a wind that struck the water and sent a line of white churning down the lake. They were not far out, but though they paddled swiftly, their light craft was

tossing like a cork before they reached shore. They made their landing, dragged the canoe to safety and fled to the cabin just as a wall of green and darkness swept down upon them.

The darkness was but momentary. With the rain came lightning, playing incessantly, revealing the swaying forest. Crack and roll of thunder, punctuated by the crash of rent trees, drowned the strident wind and lashing waves. Once a forked flame leaped down a giant spruce near by, with a report that shook even the stout cabin. In the doorway, sitting close together, they watched the charge of the storm, awed by this mood of their wilderness.

The fury was soon spent. The storm passed beyond the lake. The thunder became a low diminishing growl. The mass of clouds broke into flying streamers, stragglers fallen out of the battle. The stragglers passed. The young moon laid a pallid sheen over drenched forest and restless lake. The wind died down to a gentle crooning breeze. Still they watched, in one of their long silences.

She sighed and stirred, looking up at him. "I wonder—" She paused.

"Yes?"

"Have I hurt you?"

"Hurt me?"

"By loving you. By coming here."

"No," he cried. "How could any one be harmed by a perfect love? And it has been perfect. I can never forget. Where did you get the will to give—to give all?"

"From you."

"No! I never had it. Once I thought I had found it, but at the first puff of ill wind it died."

"Nor had I, except for you. . . . But now I can love all the world. That is why, I think, we have not sinned."

He did not laugh at her. His heart ached with a deep poignant tenderness for her. They were silent again. . . . But after a time drowsiness overcame him and he slept.

She did not sleep. Until morning she kept her vigil beside him. Sometimes she would lean over and touch his outflung hand. . . .

When he awoke the sun was well up over the hills. Kazia was standing in the doorway, looking down the lake. She heard him stir and turned. He saw her eyes.

"I believe you haven't slept at all!"

She did not answer that, but smiled, pointing.

"The guide is coming. Let us hurry. It is time for us to go."

"No!" He sprang to his feet.

"Please," she put out an appealing hand, "let us not talk of it, but hurry. We must go. I've thought it out, and it is best."

They breakfasted hurriedly and began the brief preparations to leave, putting the cabin in order and stowing into the canoes the little they would need on the trip down the river. They were soon ready.

They were about to embark when Kazia, without explanation, turned and went back to the cabin.

Many minutes passed and she did not reappear. Then Mark followed her. He found her lying prone on the pile of pine boughs that had been their couch, face buried in her arms. Harsh dry sobs shook her.

With a cry he dropped to his knees beside her, gently stroking her hair, trying to soothe her grief. He pleaded with her to stay.

Soon she had regained control. She sat up, facing him.

"How can you think of going? Back there we won't find it as it has been here."

"We must," she answered. "And now, while it's still perfect. It has been that—not a thing to regret. I've crowded into two months happiness enough for a lifetime. If I must pay for it, I am willing. . . . And you have given it to me. Do you think I haven't seen how you've watched over me, thought only of me, to make it perfect for me? I can never forget that. And maybe, some day, I shall have the chance to repay you. I pray that I may have the chance."

"It is I who will have to repay you. But why leave such happiness? Let us stay here, where love is free and clean and strong."

"If we only could! But we must go. Because it wouldn't stay perfect. There are storms even in the wilderness. A time would come—you are a man—when love wouldn't be enough. You would begin to want other men. You would chafe against the loneliness and inaction. We would go gladly then and we could look back on this only as a dream that

failed. But now—oh, I shall have something to remember! And you will have something to remember. . . . See! You know I'm right. . . . Come."

It was she who led the way out of the cabin and down to the water. They stepped into the canoes and began to paddle steadily down the lake. She did not lose a stroke, nor once look back.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CLEFT STICK

THE cloudless idyl was ended. The need of deceits, the fears, had begun. In fact, they began before our lovers had quite readjusted themselves to the changed surroundings.

In Canada's capital, thinking themselves still safe, Mark had persuaded Kazia to stay over two days, that they might have one last uninterrupted period together. It was a mistake, an anticlimax. The freedom and naturalness of the forest days were gone; in their stead came self-consciousness and repression. Speeches that had spoken of themselves now seemed forced and stilted. And the lovers learned that, though the world is very wide, on its beaten paths men are never free.

They were at breakfast when, glancing up, Mark espied a familiar figure at the doorway of the hotel dining-room: a figure of courtly and noble mien; moving with slow thoughtful stride and head slightly bent, as though, even amid the commonplace functions of life, his mind never ceased to dwell on momentous philanthropic projects; and withal modestly unaware of the whisper that ran over the room or of the many necks craned in his

direction. An obsequious captain of waiters led him down the room, and by fateful chance, toward the table where sat Mark and Kazia. Mark regarded him in that fascination which a dangerous object often has for its victim.

Now it may be that the philanthropist was not quite so unaware as he seemed of the interest evoked by his entrance, for a pair of furtively roving eyes alighted upon Mark. He stopped.

"Can it be—of course, it is Truitt. This is an unexpected pleasure." He extended a genial hand.

Mark took it mechanically. "How are you, Mr. Quinby?" he muttered out of his daze.

"I suppose I am well." Jeremiah Quinby smiled benignantly. "A busy life leaves little time to consider the state of one's health. You are looking better than I have ever seen you."

"I'm better than I've ever been."

There was a pause during which Quinby glanced tentatively at Kazia.

"Ah! Perhaps I am intruding?" Quinby smiled humorously, as one who knows his welcome anywhere is assured.

Mark brought his whirling thoughts to a stop. "No, certainly not. Mrs. Whiting—" He performed an introduction. Quinby's bow was impressive.

"I see you have just begun. Perhaps—" He paused again, suggestively.

"You will join us? Mrs. Whiting, I'm sure—"

Kazia nodded and smiled composedly.

"This is kind, indeed. Though I should not," Quinby bowed again to Kazia, "blame Truitt for being selfish." He took the chair held out for him by the waiter, glancing from Mark's sun-browned face to Kazia's. "I see you have both been out under the sun. Your party—"

"Has just separated. Mrs. Whiting is to let me—rather informally, to be sure—convoy her home."

"And what of it, since no one is the wiser? The conventions," Quinby wittily accepted the explanation, "are only for public consumption, though I—being in the public eye, so to speak—may rarely ignore them. So you, too, are from our city, Mrs. Whiting?"

Kazia admitted it.

"Ah! I wish I had known last night that you were here. The governor-general—" The phrase rolled lingeringly on his lips. "The governor-general gave a reception. You would have been pleased, I am sure, to see how our city, in my person, was honored."

"I'm very sure of it. Please tell us about it."

Quinby told them about it, with a wealth of detail. The governor-general would have been moved, could he have heard how deeply his attentions were appreciated by the philanthropist, who insisted on ascribing them, not to any qualities that lay in himself, but to his vicarious importance as representative of the great industrial center and high priest of paleontology. Mark and Kazia listened, which was

all that was necessary—perhaps all that was possible—when Quinby was present and launched upon that fertile topic, Quinby.

But under cover of his monologue Quinby was shrewdly taking stock of his hearers and their situation; he had not missed that first moment of betraying confusion. The woman, to Quinby's deep admiration, was splendidly at ease, smiling at his quips, politely attentive to his explanations and not at all in awe of him, though her hands showed him that hers was not the world of the Quinbys. This did not dull the piquancy of her physical charms, of which he was pleasantly sensible. The man, too, acted well, but he could not quite quench the burning fury in his eyes. Suspicion, guided by instinct, settled into conviction.

And the event matched Quinby's need. For in the very midday of his triumph, when the brilliancy and daring of his achievements promised to eclipse his better fortified but less original rival in beneficence, a cloud no bigger than a man's hand had crept above the horizon. And if that cloud grew bigger, not MacGregor but Quinby himself might be eclipsed—and, alas! forever. A crisis, then, when "harmony" more than ever was needed in his forces. There are, Quinby gratefully thought, more ways than one of insuring harmony. He felt of his whip and got ready to crack it.

During a temporary lull Kazia, pleading some unfinished packing, made her escape. Quinby's eyes

followed her admiringly to the door, then bent upon Mark a look in which reproof and a certain ponderous waggishness struggled for the upper hand.

"Ah! Truitt! A sad dog, I fear."

"Not at all," said Mark coldly.

Quinby was blandly skeptical. "I find you, brown as an Indian, at breakfast alone at a hotel with a woman dusky as an Indian maiden. The party—was it a party of two, Truitt?"

"Mr. Quinby," said Mark not so coldly, "your tone—! My word—"

"Ah!" Quinby waved a pacific hand. "If your word is passed, that is enough. I am happy to believe it. Mrs. Whiting seems a charming woman. A well poised woman! An unusual woman!"

"Very."

"You leave to-day?"

"Yes."

"Then, since I have your word in the matter, I feel safe in inviting you and Mrs. Whiting to share my car as far as Buffalo."

"Mrs. Whiting may have a preference."

Quinby received this with the surprise of one whose invitations partake of the peremptory quality of royalty's. "I hope she will not prefer a stuffy Pullman to my car, which has been praised. I should be deeply hurt by a refusal. In fact," Mark looked up quickly, as though he had heard a warning *crack!* overhead, "I should construe a refusal as evidence—But let that go. There are company matters I wish

to discuss with you, and this seems an opportune occasion."

The men regarded each other steadily for a moment.

"I shall present your invitation," Mark concluded.

"With my compliments," Quinby amended. "Er—Truitt, who *is* Mrs. Whiting? The name is not familiar."

"I'm sure you never heard of her. She's a trained nurse—a very successful one, I believe. I'll let you know her answer."

They rose and Mark had the enviable distinction of marching with Jeremiah Quinby through the long dining-room, where by this time the whisper of the great philanthropist's presence had been happily confirmed.

"Well," said Mark grimly, when he had found Kazia in their rooms, "you played audience to good purpose. Quinby has just informed me, with exclamation points, that you are a charming woman, a well poised woman, an unusual woman."

She breathed a sigh of relief. "Then he doesn't suspect?"

"He's so sure of the truth that he wouldn't believe his own testimony to the contrary."

"What can we do?"

"Exactly nothing but accept his invitation to travel in his car to Buffalo—and trust to luck. Flattery and submissiveness—he would call them harmony—are the way into Quinby's good graces."

He went to a window, staring frowningly out into the street for a minute before he turned to her again.

"Damn it, Kazia!" he exclaimed angrily. "I was a fool to insist on staying over here."

She winced under his tone. "So soon!"

"Oh, forgive me, Kazia." He went remorsefully to her side. "I'm thinking only of the possible pickle I may have got you into."

"You would be in it, too."

"But I couldn't be hurt. Discovery would change no one's opinion of me. Remember, you love a man on whom gossip has laid its dirty paw."

"And I've helped to give gossip its justification," she said slowly. "I'm sorry."

"Don't! Don't be so utterly perfect. What is gossip's justification compared with you?"

"It is nothing, isn't it?"

"Less than that."

"And you wouldn't—you couldn't regret our two months, even—even if we were found out?"

"Only for your sake, dear. Nevertheless, we must do our best to throw sand in Quinby's eyes."

She sighed.

But Quinby, when the journey had begun, made no reference to that party in the woods. His engaging manners—never, said the envious, so pronounced as in the presence of a pretty woman—were displayed in their perfection. Even Mark's fears were lulled.

At first the philanthropist gave himself almost wholly to Kazia. He showed her the splendors of

his car, from the little kitchen, where her expert admiration brought a grin even to the pudgy face of the Japanese cook, unto the plaster cast of the *ictyosaurus Quinbyi* conspicuously placed at one side of the library section.

"A gift from the curator and his assistants at our city's institute," he explained. "The *ictyosaurus Quinbyi* was a notable discovery. Are you interested in paleontology, Mrs. Whiting?"

"I'm afraid," she smiled, "I barely know the meaning of the word. Is that a shameful confession?"

"Not now," Quinby generously replied. "But it is my hope that the next generation shall have no excuse for ignorance."

Thereupon the philanthropist, again in detail, set forth for Kazia's entertainment his plans and the blessings that should flow when humanity had been well instructed in paleontology. He read in her unsmiling eyes the serious respectful appreciation his soul craved. Mark, taking no part in the conversation, sipped his White Rock and puffed at his panetela, which mild refreshment he had accepted at the hand of the attentive Jap.

"There are many, Mrs. Whiting," Quinby remarked once, in the accents of resignation, "who profess to ridicule my project. They see nothing of value in the noble science of paleontology. To delve into the mysteries of the prehistoric past, to extract from the earth the secrets she has hidden beneath mountain and plain, to build temples from which

this knowledge shall be spread abroad—this means nothing to them. I know it! The pioneer, I am well aware, looks in vain for recognition. He must seek his reward in the consciousness of the good begun, not in the plaudits of his fellows. Although some less backward and—in justice to paleontology I must say it—less envious have not been niggardly with praise. That, Mrs. Whiting, is what it means to be in the grip of a big idea."

"A big idea!"

Mark started inwardly. The phrase had an oddly familiar ring. . . . Then memory revived a scene long forgotten: a faded preacher, for once alive, declaiming of the "big idea" to a youth about to set out on romantic quest of fortune.

The youth had won his fortune, as he had never dared to dream it. To what end?—the old question! He had reached the period of life when a man's powers are at their highest. His powers, now preserved by a long rest from the inroads of ill health, had been developed under the stimulus of necessity and opposition. They would require an outlet. But where? To fall back into the old groove—that was impossible; from the heights of his summer's idyl the old scramble seemed uglier than ever, hopelessly repulsive. To become a dilettante of life, to potter luxuriously down into old age, was equally impossible. Even secret passion for the woman listening to Quinby's magniloquence could not fill the lonely void created by idleness; he had not long withstood her decision to leave the wilderness, because he had

known she was right. . . . He wished he could find a big idea. . . .

"A big work to do! Even a big fight to make—since there is no peace. One that would rouse all my enthusiasm, that would be worth while for its own sake—and fair and clean! . . ."

His attention was recalled to Quinby, who had temporarily abandoned, if not exhausted himself as the subject of conversation.

"Truitt tells me, Mrs. Whiting, that you are a nurse. A beautiful calling! A fitting sphere for woman—woman, tender minister to suffering!"

"And it pays," Kazia smiled, "better than most woman's work."

"But not enough. Have you ever noticed that the most important services are always the poorest paid. I have often wished," Quinby sighed, "that it lay in my power to give every deserving man and woman the just reward earned by their service."

"Ah!" breathed Kazia, "*that* would be something to do."

"And to surround them with the beauties and comforts that make life worth while," Quinby continued. "It has been a dream of mine some day to build a new city in the wilderness, perfectly planned for beauty and health, with model plants. Rearing a strong happy race of steel-makers, sons taking up the burdens laid down by the fathers, secure in the knowledge that over them stands one ever watchful for their welfare, their interests his, his interest theirs."

"Do you," Mark inquired, "refer to the Almighty?"

"You jest." Quinby shook his head in sad reproof. "So few, Mrs. Whiting, have received into themselves the spirit of philanthropy, which dreams and dares where materialism falters. To Truitt, of course, such a project would never appeal."

"But I'm not so sure," Mark answered slowly. "It would be a big work to do. And I know just the spot for the new city."

Strange the sources of inspiration!

Quinby gazed raptly out of the window, as though he already beheld the happy city rising. Then he returned to Mark, with a gesture of infinite regret. "I fear it is an impossible dream. Philanthropy, Truitt, must always be a science. And the first thing science must learn is its own limitations."

He bent a benignant smile on Kazia. "But, Mrs. Whiting, some such little justices do lie in our power. You must leave me an address. As it happens, I am a trustee, and it may be, an influence in the Todd Hospital. Surely the profession of healing offers a woman a larger—and a better paid—field than mere individual nursing?"

"To those who are fitted."

"You are modest, of course. But I am sure I have not judged you too generously."

"But you have known me—"

"My judgments are quickly made up. Truitt, I believe, will bear witness that they are usually right."

Of all the young men I have gathered around me as my lieutenants not one has been a mistaken choice. And my interest, once aroused," he bowed graciously to Kazia, "must—it *must*—have tangible results. I will not forget this pleasant day, Mrs. Whiting, and you, I think, will have cause to remember it."

"You are very good—" began Kazia.

But Quinby waved her to silence. "Not now. Some day we may meet again. Then perhaps you will have some little reason to thank me. And now let me make you comfortable, while Truitt and I discuss dull business."

He led Kazia to a big cushioned chair at the observation end of the car, had the Jap bring magazines and the latest novel.

"Is there nothing else you want?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"If you should think of something, this," he pointed to a button, "is our modern substitute for Aladdin's lamp."

She lay back in the chair, smiling her thanks up to him, as frankly as if she had not a suspected secret to brazen out. The philanthropist smiled back—and the light in his eyes, as they swept the figure beneath them, was not philanthropy.

His smile became quizzical. He leaned over and patted her hand. "You are a plucky woman, my dear. I have a short memory—sometimes."

He went back to Mark.

"Truitt," he began, "does your recovered health mean that you are going back into harness?"

"I don't know," Mark answered shortly. He had witnessed the tableau just described.

"You must get back. You are needed. Have you kept track of our labor situation?"

"No."

Quinby sketched that situation, with a terseness of which Mark had not believed him capable.

"You see," he concluded, "it is critical. I can not understand," he exclaimed strongly, "the present attitude of labor. It is utterly lacking in sense of gratitude, of loyalty. I like to think of the mills as the means to life for thousands of men. And it pains me to see them become hostile and grasping. What have they to complain of?"

"Probably they feel entitled to a little more than a bare existence."

"Didn't we grant the sliding scale three years ago?"

"Perhaps," Mark returned dryly, "they guess from the number of temples to paleontology in prospect that the scale could fairly be raised. It could."

"I don't hold with you."

"What does Henley say?"

"What would Henley say but, Fight. He is mad—utterly mad in his hatred of unions."

"Quite mad."

"In this case he is right. I have not deserved to be compelled to stand and deliver. I have always been fair to labor. I have been willing to compromise our differences, to make concessions. I have felt toward them as a father to his children. They

have now no just cause to organize to fight me. And my plans for the future do not admit of a shrinkage in income from raised scales or costly strikes. Oh!" Quinby's hands clenched in the stress of emotion. "If I were but as rich as MacGregor! *He* has been well served by the men he has made." Quinby, it seemed, had forgotten his late tribute to his young lieutenants.

"Who made him," Mark corrected.

"No," contradicted Quinby sternly. "To whom he gave opportunity. As I have given it to my partners. And never have I been so ill served as in the handling of this dispute." He paused to let the truth of this disservice sink into Mark's heart.

"This is where I need you. Henley is the last man in the world for such a matter. It is not a bully's task. Truitt, I want you to take charge of the situation, stand between Henley and the men, and settle it."

"Humph! Easier ordered than done. I don't hanker for the job, Mr. Quinby."

"You are the only one of the lot who can meet labor in a human plausible manner. It was you, I believe, who saved us from a strike three years ago—I have never voiced my appreciation of that, but I do so now. You can do it. And you owe it to me to try. Be tactful, be firm but gentle. *Suaviter in modo sed fortiter in re.* Make nominal concessions. Even go a little farther than that. But, Truitt, above all things there must be no strike." He leaned forward and put a hand impressively on Mark's knee.

"There must be no strike," he repeated. "I am a lover of humanity. I think I may even say I have proved that. It shocks me to think of the misery that would follow if the men were let to do so ungrateful, so dangerous a thing."

The philanthropist rose, to conceal his rising emotion. Hands clasped behind him, he paced half the length of the car and back. He came to a halt again beside Mark.

"Truitt—" There was a hint of nervous haste in the mellifluous voice. "Truitt, a strike would place me in a false position. I am known to have uttered publicly certain views on labor's rights. I still hold firmly to those views—in the abstract. I also hold that they do not apply to this case. But the world would not understand that. It would say—" He paused again, leaving Mark to imagine what the cruel cynical world would say.

Mark thought he could imagine it.

"Truitt!" Quinby brought his hands in a slow splendid gesture down on Mark's shoulders. "I place myself in your hands. My reputation is dear to me. Not for my own sake, but because of the work to which I have pledged my life."

Mark turned a frowning gaze out of the window. Ten miles or more sped by before he looked at the waiting Quinby.

"I'll try it."

"I knew you would." Quinby smiled once more. "Succeed and you will find me not ungrateful. Hen-

ley, I believe, is thinking of retiring—" Their eyes met.

"Does Henley know it?"

Quinby ignored the question. "He himself has said you are the only man of the broad vision and—"

"It isn't done yet," Mark interrupted. "But if I pull it through, I'd rather you'd let me build that new city." He laughed queerly. "Strange as it may seem, the notion appeals."

"But that, I fear, is out of the question." Quinby shook his head sadly. "A beautiful dream but—paleontology has claimed me."

They left the matter of reward for future determination.

At Buffalo they left Quinby, whose car was attached to a New York train. Their own train was soon ready. When they entered it, they sat for a long time in a berth that had not been made up, but not talking. It was not the intimate eloquent silence of the woodland. A heavy foreboding was upon them.

Every one else in the car had retired before either spoke. Then Mark, glancing at Kazia, saw that her closed eyes were wet.

"What's wrong, dear?"

She opened her eyes. "What a day! I thought it would never end, having to keep on acting a lie under his sly hateful eyes. Under his talk he was laughing at us always, enjoying our predicament."

"The bumptious fraud! I could have choked him when he patted your hand and looked at you as if—"

"Men are apt to look at me so," she answered wearily. "It was then he said, very pointedly, that he has a short memory—sometimes. Do you think he means that?"

"I think he does now, anyhow. For the future we've got to chance it. Are you afraid?"

"I don't know," she sighed. "I don't think he intends to forget—or to let us forget. Nothing will be the same now. He will be hanging over us, always a shadow."

He made an effort to lift the shadow. "Don't let it trouble you. I think we're safe, because his precious reputation is in danger and he imagines I can save it. You exaggerate this now, naturally. It's just the reaction from happiness too perfect. Of course, things will be the same. You'll find, sweetheart," he tried to laugh reassuringly, "there are many mountains of happiness yet unscaled."

But they were hollow words.

"Why," she cried, "can't love be free?"

"There's still a way to free ours from all danger."

She did not answer at once.

"No. Even if that had been possible, it isn't now, because—we've broken a law." She rose. "I must get some rest now. I think I never was so tired. Good night."

She left him and went to her stateroom.

Thus began the first of many lonely nights. It

was a long night for him. Most of it he spent realizing that under the prying eyes of another their idyl had become but a commonplace liaison, and trying not to wonder what was the mystery that lay behind her refusal to redeem it.

CHAPTER XXIII

PHILANTHROPY

THE Quinby strike is now history. It is, however, no part of recorded history that during the anxious months preceding one man was toiling, planning, spending himself to avert the tragic outcome he foresaw. It was quiet hidden work. Even had it succeeded it would have been no more widely heralded than in failure.

He did foresee the outcome as tragic, but not because a philanthropist's reputation hung in the balance. As he went about among the men, studying the situation, doing his quiet missionary work, he caught with a new sensitiveness a new picture: the army of steel-makers, pick of the strong races, enlisted under the promise that had lured him; marching quietly, with undramatic unsung courage into the hand-to-hand struggle with the elements; driven and obedient; daring sudden awful mischance, enduring the heat that shriveled strength, the clamor that ate into brain, the fierce effort that broke body and soul; giving, wasting themselves that the world might build bigger and stronger, move faster. Out of it they got so much of life as is embraced in a roof under which to sleep off exhaustion, some food

for their bellies and the necessity for unremitting toil, sometimes—oh, happy fortune!—a pittance to tide them through a helpless age.

Faster, always faster, ground the mechanism, toiled the army in multiplying plants, performing prodigies of production—and piling up a mountain of gold so high that close secrecy must obtain lest men, learning, refuse longer to pay the tribute levied by insane greed. Tales were told of the Truitts and Higbees, workmen who had risen to wealth before their prime, and of others—mere “laborers”! —borne to work in carriage and pair. Romantic tales that took no account of the whims of fortune or exceptional endowment. But the lot of the men did not change, save for the worse; as the mountain piled higher, their share grew less. For every Truitt were a thousand Romans, fallen out of the battle and left to nurse their wounds as best they could.

These gave their *all* to steel. The others, those who held possession of the mountain, did not give all. Of time and thought and strength at least enough was left to learn strange manners and customs, to flaunt the trophies, to practise the lately won luxury, to follow their women into new spheres. But when, seeing that the harder they toiled the less they got, the men murmured mutiny, as armies sometimes will, the others, looking down from the distant height of their mountain, saw no right involved but only a threatened revenue, and prepared to overawe or, failing that, to crush the mutineers.

Mark Truitt did not toy lightly with cold theory and philosophy. He did not try to determine the relative merit of the commander, who without army is nothing, and the army which without leaders is yet a force. He saw only a condition that disturbed him deeply, drew all his sympathies to those whom it was now his function to hoodwink and placate into a renewal of the old relation. It was not the protest of disappointed desire, nor yet the vague remorse for the cheat upon Timothy Woodhouse. It passed even beyond the hot resentment known when he had been a laborer and himself felt the cruel pressure of the masters. He was conscious of a fellowship with the men he had never felt among the conquerors. Instinctively he saw every phase of the dispute from the angle of the men's interest.

Because he looked from the angle of their interest, he strove to avert the strike. As one who knew of the secret treasure he saw it was foredoomed to failure. What chance had the men, with their young feeble organization, against the masters who had but to let loose down the side of their mountain an avalanche that would crush the mutineers? Not in such unequal contest could they win a juster, easier lot.

There was one man who saw and understood his efforts. He was Henley.

They were together one day, Mark arguing earnestly for a compromise. Henley listened, not because he was impressed by the arguments, but because he was studying the pleader.

"Are you for us," he interrupted a long period to demand sharply, "or for the men?"

"I'm for both."

"You can't be for both. Are you," Henley jeered, "still trying to play the man of peace?"

"No. I'm trying to obtain a little justice and to save the Quinby company from idle mills."

"They won't be idle long. And we can afford idleness better than the men can."

"They're growing bitter. There will be violence."

"Then let there be violence. I'll know how to meet it." Henley's jaws set. "There'll be no compromise. Every big industry in the country has been handicapped by interference and outrageous demands from these infernal unions who think they've a right to run other people's business. Except steel. That's one reason we've grown so fast. And sooner or later we'll have to come to the same thing, unless we fight it out once for all. Let us fight it out now, while we're ready—and the men aren't. The harder the fight the better I'm satisfied, because the longer it'll take the union to recover."

"You're hopeless." Mark eyed him significantly. "I see I'll have to appeal to Cæsar."

"Meaning Quinby? Cæsar's ghost must feel flattered!"

"He has an interest in the premises. I should think it would be to your interest—"

"Is that a kind of a threat?" Henley inquired harshly. "I'm not afraid of Quinby just now. Sooner or later I expect to be kicked out of this

company. But he can't kick me out of steel. And I don't propose to see the industry run to suit the whims of tough walking delegates and grafting labor bosses. You seem to be in Quinby's confidence. I'm free to say I don't like it. It looks to me as though you're hedging, so you won't have to go out with me."

"What do you expect?"

"I made you. I've given you all you have. I expect you to stand by me."

"You demand more than you give others. The men give you all they have and you refuse—"

"The men work for their living, as men must. Most of them get a good living. When they're worth it they get more. *You* got more. If they don't like our terms let them find better somewhere else—if they can. As for Cæsar, don't count too much on him. There are bigger interests than his vanity at stake just now, and you'll find when it comes to a point they'll hold. Quinby's a blatherskite, but I've never said he's a fool."

Mark said nothing. Henley's words but echoed his own fears. Henley regarded him frowningly.

"What," he demanded abruptly, "has got into you the last year? Before that I could always count on you. Now—I don't understand you."

"When it comes to that," Mark laughed shortly, "I don't understand myself."

Mark had been partly right when he attributed the mood of their return to reaction. A lighter mood

followed. Kazia's work allowed them to meet but seldom and then often for only hurried visits; the eagerness bred by separation drove such problems as Quinby and the meaning of their relation into the background. But the shadow never quite lifted. As winter wore on Kazia began to perceive growing up in Mark's heart a new interest, so strong that sometimes it intruded even into the brief hours that should have been given wholly to love.

She did not reproach him or seek by subtle arts to destroy it. She stifled the jealous pangs and passively accepted his love-making and passion, responding to his advances, but never herself thrusting love upon his notice as in the woods—and watched the new interest grow; she even quietly encouraged it to grow. Her passivity was a concealment. He was never allowed to guess the avid hunger with which she devoured the moments when he forgot all else in her or the haunting fear, having naught to do with Quinby, that made her dread even while she burned to reach their next meeting.

There was an evening when he came to her apartment, tired and discouraged, but with an air that sent her memory back to a slender youth going doggedly forth each day to labor meant for stronger men. She, too, was tired from a long exacting case whose close allowed them this leisurely meeting, the first in weeks.

"This week," she told him after he had been there a little while, "I was offered the superintendency of nurses at the Todd Hospital."

"That's fine! I'm glad. When do you begin?"

"Have you forgotten? I think it comes through Mr. Quinby."

"Take it anyhow," he answered promptly. "Since you won't let me help you."

"I don't like to be under obligations to him."

"Take it. If he meant mischief, I think we'd have heard from him before now. And it's only fair for somebody to get something out of him. God knows I'm doing enough for him."

"You mean with the men?"

"Yes. Though, if he only knew it, I'm not doing it for his sake. I believe it was for the men I undertook the job." He shook his head gloomily. "But the worst of it is, I'm almost certain to fail."

"Oh, I hope not."

"Yes. Sometimes I think I'm the only sane man left on earth. Each side thinks it's bound to win. One side is—and it isn't the men. But they won't listen to me. It makes me sick to think what they'll have to pay if they go into this hopeless contest. You don't know how the thing is taking hold on me. You think this queer talk from me?"

"I don't find it queer."

"It *is* queer. I haven't come to the why yet. Do you believe," he asked abruptly, "that love can awaken all the sympathies?"

"I believe that it can."

"It must be so." He eyed thoughtfully the blue spirals rising from the cigar she allowed him to smoke. "It must be so, because before we went

away I couldn't have felt this thing as I do now. All my life I'd looked on existence as a sort of battle royal, every man trying to knock over every other. If he got bowled over, it was just a risk he took when he entered the pit. As if he had any choice in the matter! When I got tired of it because it disappointed, I had a foolish dream—I wanted peace, a little corner to myself, out of the fracas. Then," he turned gravely to her, "I saw, I was given, a love—a real love—yours. When we came back, I began to see things that had always been staring me in the face, to *feel* them. Now I don't want peace. I accept that battle royal. But I'd like to help the poor devils that weren't given a fair start. It is, it must be your miracle, Kazia. You said once love has many fruits."

There was a little catch in her voice. "I'm glad you say that—even if it shouldn't be true."

"It is! Through you I believe I've found my measure. Wouldn't it be strange," he went on musingly, "if through Quinby—the philanthropist!—I've found my big idea?"

"Your big idea?"

"Yes." He forgot that no Richard Courtney had ever defined it for her. "I'll probably fail in this wrangle. But after that—why not?—the happy city, and in Bethel. The thing's getting into my blood. Or am I, after all, the one who is mad?"

If she was white, he laid it to weariness. "If you are, I love your madness."

A silence. When she broke it he, absorbed in the

train of thoughts set in motion by mention of the unbuilt city, did not catch the odd strained note in the words.

"Then you think I'd better take the position?"

"Ah!" He came back remorsefully to the subject.
"Of course, you must take it."

"Even from Quinby?"

"However it comes, you're fitted for it. You've earned it."

"But," she insisted quietly, "I'd have to live at the hospital. I'd have no excuse for keeping this apartment."

"Oh, no, surely not! You mustn't give it up. I need you, Kazia—these hours—" Alarm had driven all but love—he still called it love—from his heart for the moment. He leaned over and caught her to him.

"Not at once, perhaps," she murmured weakly.
"I could come here sometimes—until the lease expires—"

He laughed. "Do you think love is determined by a landlord's contract?"

"Not by that!" With a little gasping cry she reached up and clung to him.

But when he had gone she crept into her bed and lay there sleepless. She thought, not of the rapturous hour just spent, but of the new interest that was taking hold of him, that must carry him to heights where he could read a new meaning into such hours. She thought, too, of what she had not told him: the three visits that Quinby, in sudden

acceptance of his responsibility as trustee, had made to the hospital, and his greedy confident eyes. Those eyes frightened her; they seemed to have possessed her already. . . . She hated the beautiful body men loved, the heritage of flame that seared but did not consume.

During the last days of the negotiations Mark almost hoped the strike could be averted. The men, listening to his persuasions, agreed to accept a merely nominal increase in the wage scale. But the agreement must be signed, not by the men as individuals, but by the union for them; from that stand the young organization, its very life at stake, would not be moved.

Three men were in Henley's office on that last night before the decision was announced. One had just made his final plea for the compromise.

Henley shook his head firmly. "I will not recognize the union."

"But they ask so little."

Both glanced at the other man, a tall stately figure, pacing, hands clasped behind his back, up and down the room. A troubled despairing frown roughened the lofty brow.

"I'm looking ahead," Henley replied. "Labor organizations never go back, unless you catch 'em young and kill 'em off. Recognize them now and three years hence they'll demand a raised scale. Next, it will be the closed shop. Then another raise, and so on. We'll be running our mills for the ben-

efit of men who have no stake in them, never knowing when they'll be after us with new outrageous demands. I will not have it." Henley spoke with feeling.

The pacing figure stopped, looking at Mark. "What have you to say to that?"

"I say, the men are desperate. They'll stop at nothing to win the strike. It will cost us millions."

"Cheaper now than ever," Henley interrupted.

"I say," Mark went on, "this industry, this company, can afford to grant any demands labor will ever make. And there's such a thing as humanity. If that isn't enough—" He paused, looking steadily at Quinby. "If that isn't enough, I say the public is on the men's side and it hasn't forgotten the Siamese twins of production and other beautiful sentiments publicly uttered by a certain famous philanthropist."

"Ah!" groaned Quinby. "The cruel misunderstanding world!"

"The understanding world," Mark corrected coldly. "Ten thousand institutes of paleontology won't make it forget a philanthropy that failed when it was put to a real test."

"I am in a cleft stick," Quinby groaned again, and resumed his anxious pacing. But he was halted by Henley's next words.

"You had a visit from some men in New York last week."

"How do you know?" Quinby was visibly startled. "I advised them to see you," Henley rejoined.

"They're men of power. They own newspapers. They can make and unmake men and reputations. They can destroy *you* as easily as they would a corner grocer. They're interested in the future of steel. They're more interested, as every controller of property must be, in the fight to stamp out this epidemic of labor agitation. I remind you, it isn't safe to disregard their advice."

"What interest have they in my reputation?"

"Humph! They think as I do—damn your reputation!"

Quinby started, glared. His tongue fumbled vainly for words to answer this astounding lese-majesty. He took a step toward Henley, menacingly.

"Humph!" Henley grunted again. "You can save your wind. I'm not afraid of you just now. And I won't let this company be crippled by giving in to the union. The men who saw you won't permit it either—without punishing."

| "I suppose you think they can keep you in this company, too?"

| "No," Henley answered steadily. "Between you and me they won't interfere. But between you and them—between your expensive reputation and their interest—they will interfere. The labor unions are your common enemy. If you let them get a foothold here, you may as well lie down and die. For there isn't a spot on the earth where the truth about Quinby"—hatred gave savagery to the threat—"the pious fraud, the hounder of women, the traitor in business dealings, won't reach."

Quinby's glare had no power now, as at another time, to subdue Henley.

He sank into a chair, stretching out his hands to Mark in a helpless gesture. "Can't you say something?"

"If you aren't a coward and a fraud," Mark answered with undisguised disgust, "you'll know what to say. If you are—" He concluded with a shrug.

It was an intolerable moment for Quinby. He rose, made a pitiable effort to gather the tatters of his vanity around his naked cowardice.

"I leave you in charge. I go to New York tonight. An expedition starts for Tibet to-morrow. I shall join it."

He stalked stiffly to the door. There he stopped for a second, looking back with eyes that were not good to see.

Henley turned to Mark. "As for you," he began sternly, "I've let you play your game, because you could do no harm. But now, having learned that you can't pin faith even to the vanity of a coward—"

Mark met his gaze quietly. "I have learned more than that. But, at least, the feet were of iron, after all."

The next day the failure of negotiations was announced. On the next the strike was ordered.

Henley was ready. On the morning of the third day detached squads of strangers appeared in the vicinity of the mills, trying to saunter along with the air of casual ease. Motley crews: bruiser and outcast, the mercenary and the desperate, men to

whom the task ahead was a golden adventure and men to whom it was a last escape from starvation. They were Henley's strike-breakers, gathered from many cities.

And the strikers were ready, though few of them wot of preparation. They gathered about the gates of the mills, sullen, ominously quiet crowds that burned with a sense of wrong. Women were there, white-faced and frightened by the prophecy of a sixth sense; and children.

The first squad slipped unnoticed into the mills, and a second. Then along the mile or more of street an electric word passed from watching crowd to crowd, "Henley's strike-breakers!" The third squad reached the refuge of the mills only by a sudden overbearing dash. The fourth found its way blocked and itself pressed back by a surging cursing mob. The remaining strike-breakers rallied to this point and in a body tried by brute force to drive a lane through the resisting pack of men and women. But the mob grew faster, gathered around the invaders, roughly jostling them and shrieking taunts and blasphemies. Blows were struck, missiles hurled. Then above the clamor a shot was heard.

A cry, "A woman is killed!" answered by a hoarse frenzied bellow. Many weapons flashed from pockets where they had lain hidden. Other shots were heard, fired pointblank at living targets. The mêlée became a battle. When it was over, the strike-breakers had fled and two score and more lay dead on the streets. Through the labyrinth of silent ma-

chinery and chilling furnaces a mob that panted with the thirst for blood hunted out and shot down those of Henley's men who had reached the mills. . . . Mad? Mad as though a bastile waited to be taken.

Two days the terror lasted. The mills—sacred property!—were wrecked. Timid posses were driven back. Crazed orators harangued the mob and took for ironic text "the Siamese twins of production."

Then with measured tread and gleaming bayonets came the force of the law, and peace—the peace of the strong—hovered once more over Quincy's mills.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PRESSURE OF TRUTH

THE strike was broken. Engines crunched and furnaces glowed again. The men, starved out, had crept back to the mill gates, begging for work. The troops marched away and the union, at least in Quinby's mills, never raised its head again.

But at what a cost!

Jeremiah Quinby returned—not, however, with a blare of trumpets. In fact, he came almost secretly, though not wholly out of modesty; no reporter so bold or so shrewd as to win to his well-guarded presence. The expedition to Tibet had been eminently successful. A massive leg bone had been discovered, from the proportions of which the scientists were enabled to construct a life size replica of a certain prehistoric monster, which was to have been surnamed *Quinbyi*. But with discreet self-restraint the expedition refrained from calling the public's attention to this discovery. The cynical public had lately become deeply interested in the Siamese twins of production and upon the devoted head of their author had heaped its cruel satire.

But Quinby's return was not without its objects.

One of them was to unseat the arrogant Henley, and to this Quinby, without concealment or delay, bent his energies. In the other, which seems to prove that in matters of sex are neither prince, priest nor peasant, but only man and woman, more finesse was employed. Only one person had an inkling of this project and she kept well the secret.

There was heard a merry cracking of whips. One by one Quinby won the minor stockholders over to his primary object and approached the point where he could deal the blow. Henley grimly waited. Mark was not approached on the matter, for the sufficient reason that he, too, had been singled out for vengeance.

"Quinby is back," he told Kazia once.

It was one of their evenings together. Such occasions were rarer now and subtly different from their earlier encounters. Outwardly Mark's devotion had lost nothing; there was even an added gentleness in his manner toward Kazia. But there was a lack that a loving woman could not have failed to detect. For one thing, passion had gone stale. Kazia was another who waited.

There was a perceptible pause before she answered. "Yes. He visited the hospital the other day."

"Keeping his hand in, I suppose," he said lightly. "Unhappily, Quinby is cut off from public philanthropic exercises until the present cloud passes."

She achieved a smile.

"But humanity's loss isn't our gain," Mark

grinned wryly. "He's getting ready to eliminate Henley and me from the company."

"Oh, that's too bad. Will it make you—poor?"

"No. But it will leave me considerably less rich than I'd like to be."

"I thought you didn't care for money."

"No man cares so little for it that he's willing to lose it. And I'll need every dollar I have."

She guessed what he had in mind. "You say you will *need* it?"

"For my happy city." He laughed, then grew serious. "Kazia, I'm going to build it. At least, I'm going to start it."

"Ah!" She turned away with a sharp intake of breath. "It—it would be something worth while."

The little quaver in her voice escaped him.

"Bigger than you think, if it succeeds. But it's got to succeed. Do you," he turned to her with a mirthful boyish light she had rarely seen in his eyes, "detect any symptoms of insanity in me?"

"None."

"Or evidence of a philanthropic bias?"

"Not as I understand the word." But she did not smile.

"I am relieved." He laughed, then returned to earnestness. "It would be easier if it were merely a spectacular philanthropy, for then I'd have to secure only the appearance of good, ignoring the substance. As it is, I've got to make it *pay*. I must prove that men who are happy, working under perfect conditions and for decent hours and having an

honest share of the profits, will do more and better work than driven cattle. That seems self-evident, doesn't it?"

"Yes. Does it mean so much to you?"

"More than anything else in the world," he answered, blind to all but his idea. "The thing has possessed me. I've ceased to wonder if I'm crazy or to be afraid of my enthusiasm. Waking and sleeping, I have it with me, studying it, getting a definite plan and working out details. And I'm almost ready to begin."

For an hour, unconscious of cruelty, he discoursed of his plans, eagerly and eloquently. His eloquence was not in vain. She listened without comment, but as he talked the picture he saw grew before her, convincing, real: the happy city rising in the beautiful valley, a place where men toiled and were not consumed, found refuge from weariness not in vice, but in clean contented homes and wholesome sports, gave of their best to the labor because of its earnings they had a just share, living hopefully. . . . She measured it by the life of the steel-maker as she had seen it, and him by the quality of his dream.

"Do you see it?"

"I see it."

"A queer thing," he went on reflectively, "a man's life! It seems just a procession of unordered impulses and reactions, without rhyme or reason. But all the time he's learning, learning, losing here and gaining there, being shaped to fit into the niche he's meant to fill. Looking back, he can see the pattern.

I can see it was inevitable from the beginning that I should attempt this. Everything else, the things that hurt or disappointed or pleased, have been just incidental to the preparation."

"Just incidental."

"But," he continued, less forensically, "I'm not so fatuous as to believe success is inevitable. It will be a long hard pull. One of the things I've learned is to understand men of wealth. Their cruelties are the cruelties of cowardice—the fear of those who have that those who have not will force a distribution of the spoils. They're afraid of anything new or different. Therefore they will fight me as only cowards can—until they're convinced even humanity can pay dividends. That," he frowned, "is where Quinby will pinch me. Every dollar he takes from me will lessen my chances of pulling through the first fight."

"Can't you stop him?"

"As easy stop a mad snake. Quinby has much to take out on Henley and me. And we're helpless."

"Perhaps a way out will be found."

The flat lifeless voice, so unlike hers, recalled him to her.

"Are you disgusted?" he exclaimed remorsefully. "Here I've been clacking away like Quinby himself, never noticing how tired you are. Let me take you back to the hospital."

"No. I arranged to stay here overnight to begin packing my things up."

"But your lease—"

"Even leases," she answered quietly, "don't always run their full course. The agent has a tenant who wants this apartment and I promised to move out next week."

"Kazia!" He found himself flushing. Only by a strong effort could he make his eyes meet hers. "That means you think I'm forgetting you in my new plans."

"I think," she answered, "only that you're a man and that love, especially such love as ours, isn't enough."

He look at her in silence for a moment. "Kazia," he began very gently, "I could lie to you, but there must be no lies between us. Love isn't enough—*even* such love as ours. A man must do his work. It's the inescapable law. But that doesn't mean that love—that you—won't always have a big place with me, a place all your own." He drew her closer, so that her head rested on his shoulder, and smoothed the thick dark hair. "It never occurred to me you wouldn't be as interested as I in my plans. You've given me so much, you've seemed so much a part of what I'm to do—I've thought of it as *our* work—"

A hand stole over his mouth. She raised her head, and she was smiling.

"Don't! You make me ashamed. . . . And now you must go."

"Can't I stay to help you?"

"A man *pack!*" she laughed gaily.

"A man," he sighed, trying to be jocose, "has so many limitations. But it's all right, Kazia?"

"It's all right."

But when he was gone the gay manner vanished. The strong figure drooped wearily. She fell to her knees beside a chair, burying her face in her arms.

"What does he know of love?"

After a while she rose and began the task of dismantling the little apartment. Closets and drawers were emptied until the bed was piled high with the accumulation of a woman's little treasures. She came at last to a short-skirted khaki suit that gave out a faint fragrance of balsam.

The next evening, returning to his hotel for a late dinner, Mark found a memorandum to call up the Todd Hospital. From the hospital he received word that Mrs. Whiting had gone to Rose Alley and asked him to follow her. Some one was dying. He did not wait for dinner, but hailing a cab, set out on another journey to Rose Alley.

As the cab rattled along on its cheerless way, he sank from the high spiritual level to which a proposed altruism had borne him. A feeling of dread, not to be explained by the death he was going to witness, took hold of him. As he entered the dismal echoing court, which was in nothing changed, the feeling grew heavier, took form. Rose Alley had always presented a problem to him, a tie to be broken, a something to escape. . . . Had he then something to escape?

He halted, staring up at a cracked blackened wall as though he saw something that frightened him.

"Good God!" he muttered in answer to the un-

worded question. "Not that. I've taken too much."

He stumbled hastily up the gloomy staircase to Roman's door and rapped lightly. It was opened by an unkempt foreign woman, doubtless a neighbor, and he entered. Save for her the kitchen was empty. But by the light of a smoky lamp that stood on the table near an inner door, he saw a group dimly outlined. On a narrow bed lay a huge dropsical figure, seeming to Mark already dead. The *Matka*, more faded than ever, sat at the dying man's side, motionless as he, her gaze fixed rigidly upon him. At a window, her back turned to Mark and the group, stood Kazia, in the white uniform she had not taken time to change when she answered the summons. A dapper young doctor, evidently a hospital interne, was taking Roman's pulse, looking frowningly at his watch the while.

The interne saw Mark, and whispering something to Kazia, who turned, went out into the kitchen.

"I'm going now," he said. "I was just waiting until you came."

"Is there nothing more you can do?"

"Oh, I could keep him going a few hours longer. But," the interne shrugged his shoulders, "why should we?"

"Why should we? For him death is an escape."

"Isn't it always an escape for these people?" the interne asked solemnly, as though he said something very wise.

Mark glanced contemptuously over the young man, the spick and span suit and linen and soft

slender hands. "That's truer than you know, young man. But a life is a life."

"If you say—" The interne was quick to recognize authority.

"No. I wasn't thinking of him. Let him have his escape."

The doctor left. Kazia went to Mark. Gray hollows were under her eyes. Her shoulders sagged as they never had at the end of their longest tramp in the rough wilderness. He wondered that grief even for Roman, whom she had loved, could work such a change in her.

"Thank you for coming," she said.

"I'm glad you sent for me. Is there anything I can do?"

"Yes, get Piotr. He went away early this morning and doesn't know. It was very sudden. You'll probably find him at—" She named a corner a mile or more distant. "He makes speeches there every evening."

"Kazia, dear—" He laid a hand with an impulsive pitying gesture on her arm.

"You'll have to hurry," she interrupted. . . .

The cab came to a halt at a corner where many people passed. A small changing crowd had gathered around a man who from his soap-box harangued them. Most of them listened for a few minutes, stolid and without response, and then moved on. A few did not move away but stood with eyes glued to the speaker, nodding and muttering approval of his hot words.

The orator, unmindful of departing hearers, shrieked on in a hoarse rasping monotone that reached a block away. His arms flailed the air without ceasing. His ugly face was distorted with passion. Even from the cab Mark could see, by the light of the arc lamp above them, the abnormal glitter in the rolling darting eyes. He preached a gospel that, beginning with a germ of love, had grown in him into a creed of hate. It was a rambling incoherent harangue, full of bitter denunciation and vague generalities that never came to a point: the grotesque but pitiful outpouring of a feeble mind obsessed by a sense of injury real or fancied and cracking under the effort to inoculate others with its venom. Mark listened a moment.

"The man must be mad," he thought pitifully.

Piotr in his ramblings came to the late strike. He began a roll-call of the masters of the Quinby company: Quinby himself, Henley, Higsbee, Hare—

"And Truitt!" The hoarse voice became, if that were possible, even more bitter. He fairly writhed as he shrieked out his charges. "Truitt the wife-beater! The rounder! With his women—!" To Piotr rumor, however exaggerated, was but a point from which to start. For several minutes he raved on, regaling his audience with an array of disgusting but apocryphal details of Truitt's life that to his diseased fancy must have become proven facts.

"Go tell him to come here," Mark ordered the cabman. "Tell him his father is dying."

"Aw, hell!" growled a big Irishman in the crowd,

audible even to the cab. "Shut up! Truitt's th' only wan av th' lot wid bowils t' him."

"Fool—fool!" Piotr shook clenched fists at the Irishman. "Are you taken in because he tried to stop the strike? Who was he working for then, you or Quinby? Where was he when Henley's strike-breakers came to steal your jobs and shoot down your women? Where was his money when your children were starving for bread? Where—"

But the cabman had reached him with Mark's message. For a moment Piotr stared stupidly, trying to take in its meaning. Then he uttered a wild piercing cry.

"Dying!" He leaned toward the crowd, hands and face twitching in his frenzy. "My father's dying, but he can wait while I tell you about this Truitt. When he was starting out he came to our house, because my father took pity on him. My father loved him, better than he did his own son. He watched over him, cared for him, taught him all he knew of his trade. Then the old man broke. He wouldn't have been old anywhere else, but he had burned himself up trying to make Quinby's furnace hells pay. They threw him out, of course—and Truitt took his job. Truitt—partner of Quinby! The old man's heart broke. Then his mind gave way. And now he's dying—do you know where? In Rose Alley!"

The crowd had become very still. To them, too, the tragedy that tortured the madman was clear; infinite repetition could not take away its bitterness.

"And that isn't all." The emotional delirium

reached its climax. "In that house was a girl—just an ignorant Hunky girl but the kind men love. And Truitt made love to her. But when he left us, he left her, too—another broken heart! To forget him she married a worthless rummy she had to leave. Then she went out into the city to make her own living—you know the fight and the price women must pay or go down. And she—the girl he wouldn't take up with him—*she paid*—"

Bewilderment choked back the stream of words. For a man—whose pallor was not due to the garish arc lamp—had leaped from the cab and was elbowing a way swiftly toward him. The crowd fell back to let the man through, then pressed closer. Only Piotr and the Irishman recognized him. Mark caught Piotr by the arm and jerked him roughly from the box.

The Irishman's heavy hand fell on Mark's shoulder. "Let be, sor." Then he fell back before the livid countenance Mark turned on him.

"Keep out. I'll do him no harm. I'm only taking him to his father, where his place is instead of here blackguarding women he isn't fit to touch."

Piotr jerked his arm free. "I won't go with you!"

But the Irishman caught him. "Ye'll go as Misther Truitt tells yez. I'm thinkin' he's just loony, sor."

Together he and Mark dragged Piotr to the cab and forced him within. Piotr, dazed by Mark's appearance, resisted but feebly. Mark got in after

him, closed the door and the cab started. The crowd gaped wonderingly.

For several blocks Mark fought to stifle the anger Piotr's words had evoked. Anger was conquered. But a fear remained. A question trembled on his lips.

Then, as they passed a brightly lighted saloon, he saw by the reflection the miserable cowering figure before him, the ugly twitching face and glittering eyes.

"He *is* mad," he muttered. "It was just one of his ravings."

Before the grim majesty of approaching death even Piotr's madness was abashed. The supreme consciousness received back the atom that, when imprisoned in flesh, had been Roman. It was Kazia who saw.

"He *is* dead."

The *Matka* uttered a low moan, then became silent again, resumed her rigid gazing at the not less still body. Piotr's hand passed over his eyes in a bewildered gesture. The woman who kept the door made the sign of the cross and went quietly out.

Kazia bent over to kiss Roman's forehead. Then Piotr came out of his daze. He caught her roughly and drew her back.

"No!"

"Piotr!"

"You're not fit to touch him."

She turned and went slowly into the kitchen. Piotr followed.

He confronted her and Mark. "You can go now, both of you."

"Oh, Piotr, not now!" Kazia began pleadingly. "The *Matka* needs me and—"

"We need nothing from you. We weren't good enough for you once. You left us to be a fine lady. Now we don't want you."

"But I came back and you wouldn't let me stay."

"Yes, when you found that Jim Whiting couldn't give you what you wanted. You thought you could use us then—as *he* did." He nodded toward Mark. "How," his teeth bared in an ugly accusing leer, "*how* did the Hunky girl get to be such a fine lady?"

"Be still!" Mark stepped close to him, sternly. "Isn't there any decency in that cracked mind of yours? Remember she came to *them*," he pointed toward the little bedroom, "when they needed some one. You were out filling the streets with your blackguardly rant. And whose money do you think had to keep them alive because you wouldn't do a man's work?"

"A man's work!" Piotr laughed, a horrible startling cackle. "To a cracked brain that isn't to betray and gouge and drive—" He broke off. "Do you mean it was her money?"

"Who else would have cared?"

Piotr went back into the death room, clutched his mother by the shoulder and shook her cruelly. "Tell me," he cried in her tongue, "have you taken money from her—that woman—when I told you what she was?"

The *Matka* shrank back from his vehemence. "I had to—to buy things to keep him alive."

Piotr, releasing her, stared, his mouth working queerly. "Even you're against me."

He went again slowly into the kitchen, taking up his hat from the table. He did not stop until he reached the door. There he turned, facing Kazia.

"You can have her now. I'm going."

For an instant, as he looked at the pale tired woman before him, the wide-reaching hate seemed to falter. "You were always against me," he whimpered, "but never against him, whatever he did. He's had everything. I've had nothing. I suppose he has you, too." The hateful leer returned. "Are you one of his women now? . . . I see you are. You—*harlot!*"

He was gone. From without came his cackling laugh.

Mark and Kazia had forgotten death. They stood, stricken mute by a venomous word from a man whom they had passed carelessly over but whose wretched story was inextricably tangled in theirs. When their eyes met, it was in fear

"He's crazy," he muttered. "Don't mind him."

"Yes, he's crazy. And I'm what he said."

"No, no! That isn't true."

"It *is* true." She took a step toward him, looking searchingly into his eyes as though she would read the very soul of him. "Would you marry me now?"

He was caught off his guard. His hesitation was involuntary and for but an instant.

"I would," he answered firmly, too firmly. "I will."

"You see." She could not become whiter, but the weariness in her eyes deepened until he knew he could never forget that look. "Your instinct was to say no. You believe it is true. Let us make no more pretty lies."

"Then," he said, "I'm to blame, too. And there's only one thing to do."

"There's nothing to do," she answered dully. "I thought you understood. Nothing we can do can change what I have been." With an effort she recalled herself to the situation. "You had better go now. I must take care of the *Matka*. Will you please telephone to the hospital that I shan't be back to-night?"

"But I can't leave you alone here, while Piotr's at large. I'm going out to arrange for to-morrow. Then I'll come back here."

"It may be best," she agreed.

Two hours later he returned and rapped lightly. Receiving no answer, he tried the door. It opened and he entered quietly.

Hanka lay on a narrow cot, in the sleep of exhaustion. In a chair by the table, head pillowed on one arm, Kazia, too, slept. She stirred uneasily as he entered, then became still. He tiptoed to another chair and began his lonely watch.

Began anew his everlasting problem solving, learning how little of the old man Truitt had died during

the sentimental and purposeful wanderings of the past two years. For, during the moment of hesitation when he had been caught off guard—against himself as well as against her—he had seen a truth that made his soul writhe in shame. After all his rhapsodic love-making, despite all he had taken, he did not love Kazia. Love might give what she had given; it could never accept. Desire could weave a deceptive spell for a time, but desire was not love. He had sought not her but the fleshly prison—never, he thought, had hungry erring body been so prison-like—that held her. And desire, as always, eaten up by its own fires, was dying.

And the mystery he had sensed on that first night when the passionate idyl had begun! It returned to complicate the new problem Rose Alley had presented. That evening the veil had almost been drawn aside. . . . “*She paid—*” “*Harlot!*” “*Nothing can change what I’ve been.*” . . . The words kept ringing harshly in his ears, torturing him with their suggestion. *What had she been?* Could he link his life, “until death did them part,” to that of a woman with this haunting mystery? What if the mystery were solved? He shrank from the choice, the while despising himself for his faltering. Her eyes, never reproaching or accusing but only suffering, were before him always.

“Is this the Truitt that would build happy cities?” he cried to himself. “What am I to demand perfection in others? I’ve taken too much. I will make

reparation. Am I a coward to take and fear payment? All my life I've been such a coward—I will be no longer."

Easy words! . . . What reparation could he make? A name—nothing! Not by the mouthing of a priest nor by willing it could he transform a dead passion into a living love. It all came back to that: he had nothing to give her. And she was not now seeking to be deceived. By her own love—he never questioned it—she could judge his lack.

The night seemed endless. To sit motionless, looking at the relaxed forlorn figure she made, became impossible. He rose and crept silently into the room where Roman lay. A single candle was burning low in its socket. By its faint flickering glow the waxen face and folded hands seemed not dead, but only at peace. Mark looked long at him, as though Roman held the answer to his questions. Once he leaned over, whispering.

"What have you found, Roman? Is it simple there? Is there a new birth in which mistakes can be paid for? . . . I want to pay."

There was no one to see. He did what he had never done before: he fell to his knees by the dead man's bed and prayed passionately for a miracle, an inspiration of love—a love so big that it could take no account of mysteries or sin, so deep that it would grip his innermost soul.

After a long time he raised his head, as if to catch the answer. But all he heard was the crash and rumble of the near-by mills.

CHAPTER XXV

PAYMENT

IT WAS two days after the funeral. Mark had seen Kazia but for a few minutes, merely long enough to learn her new plans, and then Hanka had been present. Kazia proposed to take care of her, and that they might not have to be apart, to give up her fine position at the hospital; she thought she could obtain a new one that would take up only her days. She had, of course, to find a new apartment.

"If you will let me," he had suggested, "I'll try to arrange with the agent to have you stay on here."

"No," she had answered. He had understood: she did not want to stay, she wanted around her the fewest possible reminders of a chapter that, both of them felt in their hearts, was drawing to an end.

He believed it as he set out, for the last time, to the little apartment that had been the scene of a few rapturous hours and many brave attempts to pretend a fervor that did not exist. He limped, with a slow heavy gait that hinted, not falsely, of despondency; facing the fact that had dragged him down from the peak whence he had been surveying his "big idea". He, not less than she, although in a

different way, would be hurt by the closing of the chapter. He would have given all he possessed, even his happy city, to know that they could write a new and a finer one. And the matter had grown as he brooded upon it: all the issues of his life seemed gathered here for decision against him.

Once before a woman—loveless, grasping, hard—had stood for the failure of things he had desired. Now another, all that the first was not, summed up *his* failure. He could, it seemed, be true in nothing, could not be trusted to recognize the truth; but, creature of his gusty passions, must with distorted vision ever mistake romance for reality, tinsel for fine gold, the sophistry of immediate desire for wisdom. To possess was to taste a stale and bitter morsel. He was incomplete; nothing that he did was complete.

This was the man who dared, a moody fickle judge, to criticize life, its spectacles and cruelties and follies—the Unities and Henleys and Quinbys, all of whom at least had the virtue of consistency! This was the man who dreamed of founded happy cities! No doubt his “big idea,” too, was but a phantasy that, followed for a while, would be revealed as a fool’s vagary.

It is a sad thing for a man to lose faith in himself and his inspirations.

But that was not the last bitter drop in his cup. For this inconstant dreamer had taken toll of many others. Marcel and Suzon, long since lost to his sight in the mazes of the city, their simple hearts

wrung by a needless parting; Roman, his stricken body a stair for another's climb; a cheated Timothy Woodhouse; even Unity, meritless indeed, but ruthlessly cast off because she had ceased to please him and to make way for another; the thousands of men and women whose needs and labors and stolen reward had pieced together his fortune: all these had paid that Mark Truitt might follow his various desires. And last of all Kazia, the loving erring woman, like him in that nothing must stand between her and the thing she wanted but unlike him in that she knelt to a fixed star, craving the love he owed and could not give. Their payment stood, an ugly fact that reparation could not destroy, though he multiplied good works until their summit reached the sky.

So he went to Kazia, wanting, needing to love her, but with a heart empty of all save repentance and self-distrust.

All day Hanka had been alone in the dismantled flat, thinking not of him who had gone but of the woman who had assumed her protection. Often her head shook in troubled gesture. Hanka had not lost the habit of seeing and understanding many things from her shadowy corner. Not out of grief for the dead, she knew, had the look that haunted her come into Kazia's eyes.

The dinner was over, the dishes washed and put away; this being part of Hanka's share in the new division of labor. She went into the little bedroom whither Kazia had gone to dress. But at the door

she stopped, unnoticed, looking at the figure that lay motionless and face downward on the bed. She started to steal away, then turned again and went timidly to the bedside. She laid a gentle hand on Kazia's hair.

"Little Kazia," she murmured, half frightened at her boldness, "what is troubling you?"

"Nothing, *Matka*," came the muffled answer.

"Is it because of me? I don't want to be a burden. I can go."

"No, no! You mustn't leave me. I'm just tired."

"Heart tired. Is it because of him—your lover?"

"I have no lover."

Kazia rose wearily, and going to the mirror, began to take down her hair. The thick soft tresses fell tumbling around her. Hanka, in troubled wonder, watched the round arm that wielded the comb, the smooth firm shoulders. At Kazia's age Hanka had already begun to wither into an uncomeliness that men passed by undesiring. She went over to the dressing woman and touched timidly the firm, still youthful flesh.

"You are like your mother."

"What was she like?"

"She was like you." Kazia did not smile. "Men saw her and wanted her."

The comb became still. "Did she—did she love my father?"

"Such a love I have never seen."

"Was *she* happy?"

"For a little. As are the birds in spring. Until after you came."

"And then?"

"He was a patriot, a leader, all for Poland. He was arrested and was to be shot. The Cossack officer who held him saw her and wanted her. To buy her lover's life she gave herself."

"Did she die then?"

"Death is not so easy. She brought her baby to us and went away with the Cossack. We never heard of her again."

"And her—her lover—was he willing—"

"He did not know until after. Then he said it was a noble sacrifice. He took it—for Poland."

"Oh, these men with their big cruel ideas that take no account of women! He wasn't worthy of her. She was a fool."

"She loved."

And suddenly Kazia fell forward on the table, face buried in her arms.

For a little Hanka watched her, then stole quietly away to the kitchen. Her heart ached but she did not weep; long since she had forgotten how, for her own or another's sorrow. And she had no kindly sophistry with which to anoint a troubled heart. People sinned, they were beaten down, they suffered; they could but endure. She stayed alone in the kitchen, even after she heard Kazia moving about.

It had been dark almost an hour when the bell

rang. Hanka heard Kazia going to the door and a startled exclamation answered by a mellifluous voice Hanka did not know. The visitor was admitted and taken into the sitting-room. To the kitchen came the murmur of Kazia's voice and his, chiefly his.

He had been there but a few minutes when his voice changed. It became eager, with an undertone that perturbed Hanka strangely. Once Kazia uttered a low hurt cry. Hanka rose and crept along the little hall. She crouched in the darkness near the sitting-room door, listening intently and wishing she had not been so stupid about English.

"Am I an ogre?" the mellifluous voice was saying.
"I do not love you."

"It is not a question of love. I am not old, but I have lived long enough to prick that illusion. We scientists know what love is."

"I don't care for you in any way," Kazia answered coldly. "Mr. Quinby, you oughtn't to be here. A man in your position—"

"My dear lady, let me remind you that the interest of a man in my position is not to be rejected lightly. With a word I gave you the best position your profession offers a woman. With a word I can take it away. I can relieve you of the necessity of working at all. I can make it impossible for you to find work in this city."

"Threats—"

"My dear lady!" the stranger's voice protested.
"I would not do that. I would harm no one. I am

a tender-hearted man. I, too, suffer, if by chance others suffer through me." The voice, vibrant with emotion, would have wrung tears of sympathy from a stone. But Hanka, as we have seen, could not weep. "I am only trying to show that those who enlist my interest do not lose by it."

"So you think I am for sale?"

"Forgive me, my dear," said Quinby, "but that is gross. Say rather that, since you have struck a responsive chord in my breast, it will be my pleasure to be guardian of your welfare, to lift you out of the sordid struggle for existence. And have I not proved that? You lay in the hollow of my hand. With a breath I could have destroyed your reputation. But I kept silence, I advanced your interests, I held you tenderly in my heart. Ah!" In his agitation he began to pace swiftly back and forth across the little room. "Words are weak. What can I say to convince you of the hold you have taken on me ever since that fateful morning in Ottawa? Day and night, on land and sea, you have been with me in spirit, luring me, bidding me come, to forget my projects and the world's ingratitude in your charms. I fought against it. But in vain—you have been too much for me. I have come. Woman—" He halted before her. "Woman, you have bewitched me. I want you."

So might a sultan have summoned a woman of the people to his harem.

Hanka understood at least his last words and she understood his tone. She crept closer and through

the crack of the sitting-room door saw Kazia elude Quinby's outstretched arms, saw her, standing just out of his reach, stare at him with a strange rapt expression as if something about the flushed man before her or something he suggested had thrown a spell over her. Hanka's heart sank. What could her simple mind know of the mad thought whirling through Kazia's?

At the same moment she heard a halting step on the stairway. She opened the outer door and went out to meet Mark Truitt, whispering excitedly to him in Polish. When he, astonished by her appearance and emotion, would have spoken, she clapped a hand over his mouth, and clutching him by a sleeve, drew him into the hall. She pointed through the crack.

Again Quinby reached toward Kazia and again she recoiled.

"Don't—don't touch me."

"Why do you rebuff me? You're not an ignorant child. You must have known what my interest in the hospital and in you this year has meant. You wouldn't have taken my help unless you were willing to give me what I want."

"What is it—what is it you want?"

"I want you to be to me what you have been to Truitt."

"And if—if I refuse?"

"I have never yet told that I caught Truitt and a sun-brown woman alone in an Ottawa hotel under circumstances—I have no reason to love him. I

have refrained from telling only for your sake. I—Why do you force me to say this? I have no wish to be brutal to you. Seeing you has turned my head. But you will not—surely you can not refuse."

She dropped back into a chair, covering her face with her hands. When she looked up, she wore again the strange rapt expression.

"You said," she whispered chokingly, "you said—you would pay."

"Yes, yes!" he cried eagerly.

"You are trying to rob Mark Truitt—to force him out of the company. Will you—give that up?" Still in the same broken whisper.

"Even that. You are worth everything."

"And will you give me time—to send him away—and never let him know?"

"It is for you to make conditions. Ah! my dear—"

In triumph Quinby stepped toward her and bent over to take her hand.

"Don't do that!" said a voice behind him.

Quinby whirled. For a long silent minute the trio faced one another.

Then Mark, white of face, hands working convulsively, went slowly to the stupefied Quinby, who seemed turned to stone. He did not resist even when Mark's hand leaped up and caught him cruelly by the throat. He was pressed back until his back met the wall. The grip tightened. Quinby's face grew purple. He squirmed and tried to cry out, but only a hoarse gurgle resulted.

Kazia came to herself. She sprang to her feet and caught Mark's arm, breaking his grip.

"Don't hurt him. He's not worth it."

Gently, without taking his eyes from Quinby, Mark freed his arm from her clasp. But he did not touch Quinby again. The first murderous impulse died. He turned contemptuously away from him.

Quinby, released from the cruel hand and eyes, started across the room. Mark whirled upon him once more.

"Stop!"

Quinby stopped. "This," he said weakly, "is a trap."

"Set by yourself." Mark turned to Kazia with a helpless mirthless laugh. "What is my cue? Shall I kick him down-stairs—or spring his dirty trap?"

"Let him go," she answered listlessly.

Mark shook his head. "Not without paying. He said," grimly, "he was willing to pay."

"I'm not afraid of you," Quinby muttered a feeble defiance. "What can you say of me that isn't true of you?"

"Ah!" Mark drew a sharp whistling breath. Quinby shrank back, his hands going protectively to his aching throat. "Now you shall pay. You—" He broke off with a gesture of disgust. "I find I've no stomach for blackmail just now. I'll telephone Henley to come over. He'll know how to handle this situation."

Then Quinby was indeed fear-struck. He clutched Mark's arm tightly. "Don't tell him!" he quavered.

"We can settle this ourselves. I didn't really intend to force you out of the company, only to—to frighten you a little."

Mark jerked his arm free. "So you're a coward as well as a fraud! But I knew that before. This is too sickening. You'd better go."

Quinby started again to go.

"Wait!"

Quinby waited.

"You seem to be afraid of Henley. You have reason. To-morrow at ten-thirty you have an engagement to meet him at his office—I have just made it for both of you. At eleven *I* will meet him. You know best what Henley in his present mood will do if he gets wind of your latest adventure in philanthropy. Now go."

Quinby went. The next morning, prompt on the hour, he kept his engagement with Henley.

A weakness for epigrams has defeated more than one fair project. After a discreet interval—long enough, as he thought, for the interment of the dead past—Jeremiah Quinby sought to revive the paleontological propaganda. He found that for once the public memory was long and laid more stress on the fateful twins of production than on *icthyosauri* and kindred monsters. The air was darkened with poisoned barbs of satire and derision. There fell a great philanthropist, pierced to the heart. That is to say, Quinby retired from the realm of beneficence and his rival reigned absolute once more. •

A heavy troubled silence was in the little room.

Kazia stood passively by the table, waiting for Mark to speak. After a long while he raised his eyes to hers.

"Kazia, you poor romantic fool! Did you think any amount of money was worth that—even if he had kept his word? When I think what—oh, how could you think of it!"

"I wanted," she answered in a queer lifeless voice, as if benumbed by this crisis into which they had stumbled, "I wanted to do one thing for you—and your happy city."

"My happy city! What happiness could it have had, built on that? And I—hadn't you given me enough?"

"I gave you only love."

"Only!"

"It was all I had to give. It wasn't enough."

"I wish I could have given as much as you." The wistful words slipped out.

He stepped closer to her.

"Kazia, this has got to end."

"Yes."

"You must marry me to-morrow."

Life, and with it pain, flickered once more.

"You are trying to give something now. But I'm glad you said that."

"I'm asking you to give something more. You will?"

"Why do you ask it?"

"Because I've hurt you enough. I did hurt you

when I let you—led you to sin, even though we kept it a secret from the world. I want to make you happy—you said yourself we've broken a law. I want happiness—and I can't have it, knowing that for all I've taken from you I've given nothing."

She tried to smile; the sight of it cut to his heart. "Every reason but the one. But I'm glad you wouldn't lie to me now." The smile faded. "You see. I can't."

"Kazia, dear," he pleaded, "you mustn't, you can't refuse. All the rest of our lives hangs on this. We can't sin any longer. Don't you see, the freedom in love we dreamed could never bring a lasting content? Love is more than a pretty holiday in the woods. It's a force with a purpose we can't ignore without being hurt. We've taken it and we can't shirk its responsibilities. Come, dear! We started wrong—let's begin over again. Let's give love a new birth."

His voice rang with a longing she could not understand, but he could not touch her. She shook her head spiritlessly.

"There can be no new birth so long as there is memory. You could never forget that I—that I am not *clean*."

"Do you think me so small as to hold my own fault against you? It is my sin, too." He stepped closer, reaching out his arms to take her. "Come, dear, your poor little reasons aren't enough."

She shrank away from his clasp, trembling. Into the tired white face came a look of fear and despair.

She glanced this way and that, as though she sought an escape. Her hands went to her face. Then she forced them down and her eyes to his.

"I thought—I thought you understood. . . . I—I wasn't clean—before we sinned. The doctor who helped me, I—" She could say no more.

Suspicion had not prepared him for this. He stared foolishly at her, showing how he recoiled from the fact her broken words had revealed. He did not then think it strange that the shame of a woman he did not love should stab so deeply.

"Kazia, how could you—how could you!"

After a while he forgot his own pain a little in pity for the silent stricken woman. Again his arms reached out for her and would not be denied.

"It must make no difference." His sternness was all for himself. "What am I to blame you? You sold your body to live. I gave my soul to feel others squirming under my feet. You hurt only yourself. I've hurt every one I touched. I hurt you. If I hadn't been a coward years ago when we first loved, you would never have been tempted. Your sin is only a part of mine. It is you who have most to forgive."

Slowly she raised her head to look at him. "And you," came a broken incredulous whisper, "and you would marry me—even now?"

"All the more now!"

For an instant a faint pitiable hope, defying knowledge, shone in her eyes. "Have I been mistaken? Only love could ignore—ah! don't lie to

me now. It wouldn't be kindness. Is it just pay—or love?"

He tried to look away from her and could not. Her eyes held his, seeking through them to hunt out the last truth hidden in his soul. With a rough convulsive movement he drew her head down on his shoulder.

"How can I know what it is? It must be love, since I need you and want to make you happy. If it isn't now, surely love will come when we start right. Kazia, don't refuse me this chance to make up to you a little of the harm I've done you."

Her answer was a stifled sob. He felt her body relax; her head rested heavily on his shoulder.

She released herself. He did not try to hold her. They faced each other in a heavy throbbing silence.

His soul quivered with the cruelty of it; it would have been infinitely easier for him if she had been the unfaithful one. The sight of her, passive, uttering no reproach, dumbly enduring, burned into his memory, another item in the indelible record of havoc wrought by his heedless desire. His words echoed mockingly in his ears, torturing him with their hopeless futility.

"You will not?"

"You couldn't say it—and I don't want pay."

The sight of her had become more than he could endure. He turned away and dropped into a chair, letting his head fall to the table.

After a little he felt her hand gently smoothing his hair. And soon she began to speak in a voice

unsteady at first but gathering strength as she went on.

"You mustn't reproach yourself. I know you'd love me if you could. And you mustn't think I refuse just for your sake. I'd do what you want—since you want it so much—only it would be misery for me always. You wouldn't want that. . . . And this—it seems I've always known it would come. It was a chance I took for a few months' happiness. I've had my happiness. . . . You haven't harmed me—I beg you to believe you haven't harmed me."

"Kazia—"

But the hoarse cry died away. There was nothing to say. His humiliation was complete. Magdalen that she was, he looked up to her from depths of self-abasement she could never know.

The voice was growing unsteady again. "When I think how it might have ended—if you hadn't come to-night—! I'm glad you came—to save me from—that. . . . And now—I think you had better—go. . . ."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE PENITENT

IT WAS a red sunrise, that Sabbath morning, and the ruddy glow lingered in the eastern sky long after the sun had swung clear above the hills. A slanting shaft found his window and fell upon him as he dreamed. He stirred restively.

He awoke slowly, reluctantly, drifting toward consciousness through a golden haze that vibrated with far-away dwindling harmonies. An heroic strain, clearly defined, as of an army marching with song into battle—fit accompaniment to visions such as he had long believed could never visit his slumber again.

The resonance died away. His eyes opened to the red glory of the morning, then quickly closed. He lay very still, trying to call back the harmonies; they seemed strangely familiar. But fancy was not equal to the task.

“Where have I heard that before?”

After a little he remembered: a youth, full of dreams and credulous, joyously facing his great adventure.

“And to-morrow I set out on a new adventure. It was a long way from there to here. . . . I

wonder, would any man, given the choice, travel his road a second time?"

He rose and went to the window, a man from whom the grace and buoyancy and smooth beauty of youth had passed and to whom a better thing had come. The dreaming youth had been a promise. This man was a promise fulfilled. On the thin angular face, framed by the fast graying hair, were written proven power to achieve, strength to endure even where hope did not sustain, the will to give.

Two years had passed, crowded with effort, crowned with achievement. From the window where he stood, still seeking to recover the lost harmonies, he could see the beginning of his happy city, all ready for the great experiment.

Only the eye of hope could have seen there the thriving community he had once visualized. It was then but an unimposing village of simple homes laid out on the southern slope of the valley and to the windward of the mills; in the matter of size even the old Bethel had no room for jealousy. And only an expert, crossing the new bridge and studying at close quarters the compact little plant on the northern bank, would have found there a promise as well as the supreme triumph of a man whose constructive gift had not been unknown.

More than one expert had come to spy out the land, seeking reason to scoff, and had departed shaking their heads wonderingly. All agreed that, mad though the builder might be when he stepped out of his own field, only genius strangely fired could have

devised this mechanical masterpiece. Some, carried away by their admiration, refused to admit even a partial insanity.

But the man at the window took no pride in his achievement. The holy flame of inspiration, warming genius to a new life, had brought with it none of the joy of creation. Toil, tremendous and persistent though measured to his carefully hoarded strength, could not kindle ardor. Not as the crusader fights had he begun to build his city, but as a sinner whose humbled soul requires at once a torturing penance and a refuge.

He saw with fainting hope, with an eye that beheld only the chances of failure. In a sense it had already failed for him. Penance could not lighten penitence. The glamour of his "big idea," conceived in a romantic sentimental mood, had departed; nothing, he now believed, could restore it.

He bathed and dressed—in the new bathroom that was his one concession to the luxuriousness of the old life—and descended to the kitchen. The pleasant odor of frying ham met his nostrils; there was a hotel in Bethel now at which the Truitts generally had their meals, but sometimes, of a leisurely Sabbath morning, Simon still served as cook.

But the bent old man at the south window had forgotten breakfast. For a little Mark watched him without salutation.

"Good morning, father," he said at last.

"Good morning, Mark." Simon turned reluctantly from the window. "I was jest thinkin' it'll

be twenty years to-morrow ye went away—an' now there's that."

"Yes. Your dream has come true. If you live until to-morrow night you'll have seen it all—steel made in Bethel."

"I'd like to live that long," Simon answered simply.

Mark smiled gently. More than once, lately, he had noted in Simon signs of a growing childishness.

"Much longer than that, I hope. Are you content?"

Simon hesitated. "I reckon ye think I'd ought to be. It's come easy to me. All I had to do was to think about it an' wait fur ye to build the mills. But I wish I could give something to 'em."

"You gave the idea. That's something. I suppose a good idea is never lost. You failed but kept the idea alive. I caught it from you and built the mills, adding my own idea. The mills will go on, though I may fail. And I suppose some day somebody will take up my idea and make something of it." He smiled again. "Prettily reasoned, anyhow."

"Ye say ye may fail?"

But Mark had taken Simon's place at the window and did not seem to hear the question. Simon did not press it then. He resumed his slow methodical setting of the table.

Breakfast ready, they sat down and began the meal in silence. Mark ate lightly, absently. It was

not until they were about to rise that Simon ventured to repeat his question.

"Ye say ye may fail?"

"Eh? Oh, yes, it is possible."

"Why?"

"It may be the wrong time. And—I may be the wrong man. It's very likely I'm the wrong man."

He rose abruptly and went out of the house toward the stable. He had spoken quietly, but Simon watched him with a troubled frown.

Later he saw Mark sitting in the stable doorway, motionless, arms folded, staring unwaveringly into space. More than once Simon had come upon him so. What, the father now wondered, did he think, what hidden sorrow uncover, during those long silences? Ever since Mark had returned, Simon had been vaguely sensible of a suffering to which some solacing word might be said. But the word would not come to his unschooled lips.

"I wish," Simon thought, "I could give *him* something."

The warm sun beat upon Mark, but it had no power to lift the shadow resting over him. He was thinking of a miracle that had not come, seeing a broken sobbing woman, a paying Magdalen, whose courage at the last moment had failed, whose eyes betrayed the hurt she had had at his hands.

Two years had but burned that picture the clearer in his memory. And he had ceased to hope the miracle would come.

But he had paid, he was paying, with a penitence that, too, grew more poignant with the slow months, eating into his soul, forbidding happiness, chaining his spirit to the earth when it needed to soar. It did not seem strange to him that for her, the last item in his record of heedless destructive desire, his penitence passed beyond the surface agitation with which most men pay for their sins. It did not seem to him unjust; he even welcomed it; since he could make no reparation, he could at least pay a penalty.

It was a real suffering Simon sensed, no day without its hour of payment, no hour so heavy as on that Sabbath morning.

From across the town came a mellow clamor, the voice of the new church bell calling the faithful. Its vibrations lingered sweetly on the morning air, reminding him of the harmonies he had heard at sunrise.

"A sad omen," he thought. "But I've no right to whine. Before every mistake I was given the warning and the knowledge to avoid it. And I didn't heed. Therefore I pay now."

The clamor had ceased and after an interval resumed for a few last taps before he rose and went into the house for his hat and cane. When he emerged again he found Simon sitting on the front stoop.

"Goin' to church?"

"I guess I'd better."

"Yes. Courtney likes ye to. Do ye," Simon asked suddenly, "still believe what he preaches?"

Mark hesitated a moment. "I suppose I never did. I'd like to, but I can't. It takes a certain quality of mind, I suppose—or early habit. I can't quite see—" There was that in Mark's tone which made Simon look up quickly. "I can't quite see the logic of letting another's suffering pay for our sins."

"No."

The bell had become silent, its last echo dying away in the distance. Into the ensuing silence rose the voice of the congregation in hymn. . . . *Love Divine, All Love Excelling* . . . The two men listened until the hymn was concluded.

"Courtney," said Simon, after a silence, "says it ain't logic—but love. An' sometimes I—"

"Love!" Mark seemed to be thinking aloud rather than answering the old man. "That's simple enough to be true. Yes, love would do that—if one could only be conscious of it. But love is its own law. It comes and it goes and we, needing it, are at its mercy."

"Ye'll be late," Simon suggested.

Doctor Hedges, driving along the valley road, drew up at the station until the eleven o'clock train, having discharged its Bethel passengers, sped onward. The passengers were two, a man and a woman, strangers to the doctor and therefore alien to Bethel. The woman stood on the otherwise deserted platform, looking uncertainly around her. The man made directly for the doctor.

"Do you," he demanded, "know where Mark Truitt lives?"

"Why, yes." The doctor bestowed a friendly smile on the stranger. "I guess I do."

"Can you show me how to find it?"

"Yes." Hedges glanced toward the woman; she was entering the station. "I can do better. I can take you there."

"If you will." And the stranger promptly entered the buggy.

The doctor clucked to his horse and turned hospitably, with conversational intent, to his guest. But the latter forestalled him.

"Live here?"

"Between whiles."

"Ha!" The stranger smiled, a brief wintry smile. "Doctor, I see. Do you know Truitt?"

"Well," Hedges spat ruminatively, "that's a pretty risky think to say of any man, but I guess—"

"What do they think of him here?"

"They think he's a great man—and it's his own—"

"He's a great mechanic," said the guest shortly.

"I," drawled the doctor, "know more about men than mechanics, but—"

"What do you think of him?" the guest interrupted again.

The doctor, hoping to complete at least one sentence, quickened his drawl. "He's a man who's either losing himself or finding himself, I'm not sure—"

"Meaning?"

"You wouldn't," chuckled the doctor, "have time for the explanation." He drew up before the little cottage. "He lives here."

"Hardly!" the visitor retorted. "I take the three o'clock train. Much obliged." He sprang, more briskly than his rotundity promised, out of the buggy.

The doctor drove away, still chuckling. The chuckle would not have died even had he known his passenger to be none other than that Henley whose star, flashing with comet-like swiftness and brilliancy above the horizon of speculation, had in two years achieved full planetary dignity and importance. But the doctor was not a student of Wall Street astronomy.

"Humph!" The luminary surveyed the weather-beaten little cottage with its unkempt yard and nearby smithy. "So he lives *here*. Affectation, of course!"

He strode up the path and saluted the old man on the stoop.

"Mr. Truitt lives here, I believe?"

"I'm Simon Truitt. But I reckon ye want Mark, Mr. Henley."

"Ha! You know me. His father, I suppose?"

"Yes. I saw ye once, years ago, when he was in the hospital."

"I remember," said Henley, who had forgotten that incident completely. "Is Truitt about?"

"He's at church."

"Church! Surely not a habit?"

"He goes gener'ly, since he come back."

"Hmm! Something new for Truitt." Henley frowned. "And my time's short. I suppose I may as well save some of it by going over the plant now. There's no objection, I suppose?"

"No; I," Simon ventured uncertainly, "I was jest about to go over myself."

"I'll be glad of your company," Henley graciously replied. "Shall we start?"

An hour later Henley emerged from the shadowy finishing mill, blinking hard in the midday's sunshine and trying to revise his estimate of the situation.

For despite the spying experts' reports Henley had come as a skeptic, remembering a man whose genius had withered. He had come also as a foe, intending—by virtue of the authority vested in luminaries of the second magnitude—to forbid the projected Utopia of which vague tales had reached his ears. He had believed he could do that—with a word turn Truitt aside from his mad course, restore sanity to a mind whose erratic tendency he had more than once corrected. Had not Truitt always been as putty in his hands? Life in a constellation had taken nothing from Henley's arrogance. His sense of humor may have suffered.

But now, with misgiving and a reluctant admiration, he said, even as his experts had said, "This is the work of a very lucid mind."

He followed Simon out on a tiny cape that jutted into the river, whence they could see other evidences of Truitt's lucidity—the hospital, the bank, the store, the cluster of homes gleaming white on the hillside. And Henley saw—not as the experts had seen, happy if they perceived all that had been reduced to fact—but with the eyes of one whose greatness was to see what might be, what could be. And as he looked part, at least, of Truitt's dream was unfolded before him. The valley a teeming throbbing citadel of industry. The city clambering over the slopes, capturing the heights, reclaiming other slopes from the forest, until in length and breadth, in numbers and importance, it rivaled that other fastness where he, the master, had been known only as a lieutenant. The creator in him, not yet killed, but only obscured by the madness of exploitation, thrilled at the sight.

"He sees big," he muttered. "He sees big. I didn't think it was in him."

He stood on the point, scanning thoughtfully the noble valley, forgetting his silent companion. "He's picked out a great site. . . ." And then to Henley came a vision of his own.

That city and citadel *his*, creature of his genius and might, doing his bidding, yielding him homage and tribute, carrying forth his fame to the paling of lesser men's reputations, capital of an empire—*his* empire.

"By God!" he breathed aloud. "By God! . . .

And it's possible—how did the builders of cities overlook this place? . . . It would be better than doing faker's tricks with stocks and bonds."

He became conscious of Simon's curious gaze and turned sharply on him.

"Old man, you seem to know a surprising lot about making steel. Look down the valley—there, on those hills. Do you see anything that isn't there?"

Simon looked and nodded. "I've be'n seein' it more'n forty years."

Henley stared. "Humph! An epidemic. There's magic in these hills." His thoughtful glance swept them once more. "But damned alluring magic."

The gentle, sometimes plaintive voice of the preacher had no power to distract from thought. His wistful message could not reach the man for whom it had been prepared in the hope that it would come to him with healing in its wings.

"Love would do that. . . ." His own chance words kept running through Mark's mind, bidding him follow them along a new path. He followed, wondering that he had never trod that way before.

Was that, then, the evidence of love? Was there another manifestation of the miracle than that he had asked and awaited? For he had sought love, thinking to find it expressed as he had known it before, in the old romantic visioning, the rhapsodic sentimentalities, the lust to possess. Mark Truitt was not the first to make that mistake. The coast of life is littered with the wrecks of those who

have taken the flickering glow of youth's blind impulse to wed or the red flame of manhood's passion for the true light. But that morning a new perception dawned.

The poets and preachers were right. There was —there must be—a love that passed beyond the realm of the senses, that knitted souls as well as bodies, declared itself not in greedy cruel desire but in the knowledge of a perfect indestructible unity and the gentle will to serve, when it most gave received most. Such a love would not stand aghast at sin, would suffer in its mate's suffering, yearn to bear that other's burdens. That love he had never seen, never met in his passionate pilgrimage. But that the heart was capable of it he knew from his own need; only in such guise could the miracle come.

The preacher was closing. Like an echo came his last words to Mark.

" . . . Faith, purpose, love, the trio of forces without which no life is complete. And of these the greatest is love. For love suffereth long . . . seeketh not her own . . . thinketh no evil . . . endureth all things . . . never faileth. Oh, my friends, open your hearts!"

The benediction had been said. Mark went quietly from his rear pew out of the church and limped slowly along the dusty weed-flanked pike until he came to a minor crest. There he dropped on the roadside and turned his eyes to the valley.

The murmurous quiet of noonday was about him. A few snowy billowing clouds floated majestically

in a sky of deepest blue; their shadows careered lazily over hillside and bottom-land, touching brown stubble-field and sunlit foliage with a royal purplish hue. A warm breeze stirred fitfully; ragweed and goldenrod danced lightly at its summons. From the ruffled river glanced a myriad points of golden light. The faint elusive fragrance of sweet clover came to him.

But he, as had been the blithe youth of that other Sabbath, was insensible to such beauties. Then, the valley and its encircling hills had been to him the background for a slender girlish figure that tripped daintily before him to the accompaniment of other-world music, a fair and a false promise of the issue of his great adventure. Now, they framed the paying Magdalen, summing up the adventure's failure and his unworthiness. Thoughts of her persisted strangely this day; she seemed vividly real and near.

Poor, desirous, yet aspiring Kazia, sinning once as the price of an escape, sinning again because he would not let her have her love clean. He winced at the thought of that first evil from which he might have saved her. But it was not in recoil, rather in exquisite sorrow for her suffering, wishing he could lift the burden of her shame to his own shoulders. . . . But that, he had said, was the mark of love. So close had the miracle come.

Instinct answered that. "No! If it were love I should know without persuasions. *Open your hearts!* My gentle dreamer, it isn't so simple. Who would refuse any one of your trio of forces, if it were to be

had? But they are not to be had for the wanting—or for the asking."

Up the rise, village bound, creaked a battered old top-buggy, bearing a passenger whose grizzled beard and lined face, too, showed the marks of time's battering. Mark gathered himself together; heart-sick often, sometimes even morbid, though he might be, he had no wish to inflict his woes on others.

The buggy drew up beside him.

"Howdy, Mark."

"Howdy, Doc."

"Did he find you?"

"Who?"

The doctor chuckled. "Guess he didn't, or you wouldn't have to ask. He's a vigorous party that doesn't understand the joy of talk. I took him from Number Four to your place."

"Short and stout—"

"And not much for looks," Hedges concluded the portrait. "That's him. Has a way with him, though. And the habit of taking what he wants, I guess, without waiting. He," the doctor grinned, "admits you're a great mechanic. Feel your hat tightening any?"

"Not perceptibly," Mark smiled faintly. "You should be more respectful. He's a famous magician. He knows how to turn water into gold."

"Sho! I wish," Hedges sighed humorously, "I knew the trick."

His eyes sought, not humorously, Hedges Hill. On its level windswept top could be seen a heap of

charred ruins, relic of the doctor's big idea. Ten years before he had built his sanatorium, investing therein the savings of a lifetime. He had seen it burned to the ground ere it was a year old. Through some technicality the insurance company had avoided payment. Therefore "Doc" Hedges was held lightly in the esteem of his neighbors; in Bethel as in less obscure corners of the earth not low aim but failure was crime.

"Do you ever think of trying it again?"

But the doctor did not hear. His face was still turned wistfully toward his hill. Mark repeated the question.

"Eh? Why, yes, I aim to—if I live long enough to save enough. And I reckon, if I do, old Methuselah'll have to let that record go. But if I don't, some one else will. This air's too good to waste."

"You have faith!"

"Why, yes," Hedges answered simply. "And something to work for. Without them life'd be just a valley of dry bones, I guess."

Mark nodded. "Just a valley of dry bones."

The doctor glanced at him keenly. "You have something to work for," he said kindly. "And if you haven't faith, it'll come. It'd be only fair. Down there," he nodded toward the valley, "there's a good many have faith in *you*."

"And if I fail, they'll be worse off than ever. They'll have lost a hope. That's the worst of it."

"Better quit thinking of that." With laudable intent the doctor tried to change the conversation.

"Sunday traffic," he drawled, "is getting pretty heavy. Number Four brought a woman, too. Expecting any baggage of that kind?"

Mark shook his head absently

"No? That's too bad. She's a new kind for Bethel—a right pleasant kind, too, though I'm not sure how our women'd take her." The doctor grinned, but his pleasantry won no answering smile from Mark. "Well, I must be moseying along. Better ride into town. That vigorous party'll be near to apoplexy by now, waiting for you."

Mark got in and the buggy resumed its creaking journey. The doctor rambled on.

"A good many new sorts come to Bethel nowadays. Good thing for us, too—gives us a peep into the world. We've you to thank for that. I came across a queer one yesterday. I was up on the Hill—I go there sometimes even since the fire. I found him camped out in the old tool-shed—about the only thing the fire missed. He's a half-starved little rat, with a straggly brown beard and a club foot. I asked him how he got there and he didn't seem to know. Said he'd just walked and walked and walked till he found the shed. I wanted to bring him back to town, but he wouldn't come. His mind's more than half gone, I should judge. You'd better send some one out to look after him."

"I will."

"And he says," the doctor concluded his heralding of fate, "his name is Peter Anderson."

CHAPTER XXVII

CITIES UNBUILT

HENLEY was pleased to be facetious.

"The great Utopian—in his modest cottage—living in democratic simplicity among his village neighbors. Very pretty! I suppose you do the chores, too."

"Sometimes—what we have."

"*Very* pretty! The Sunday papers would like that. But it's a little too theatrical, don't you think?"

"Not consciously so. The place was here, and it served my purpose very well. I don't need much room, you know. I'm not a Wall Street hero."

"Humph!" grunted Henley, still a skeptic.

"What," Mark asked, "did you come here for?"

Henley grunted again. "Cordial, I must say! I came to restore your sanity." He rose, mopping his red face with a silk handkerchief. "Take me out of this sun and I'll begin. I hear you're pretty far gone."

Mark led him into a cool office-like room—pleasant enough—and made him comfortable with a cigar and a chair by a window from which a view of the valley was to be had.

"Not sybaritic," Henley grudgingly admitted, "but good enough for a man—who has no women. Now tell me what you're trying to do here."

And Mark began, simply, without enthusiasm or sentimentalizing, to set forth his idea.

Henley listened intently, studying the while, with a growing astonishment, the grave quiet-voiced man speaking. For he saw both a marvel and a mystery. Here was a man of powerful talents for which a rich hungry market was waiting, of proven mettle for battling, who had tasted the sweets of conquest and won a footing from which he could go indefinitely farther and higher, giving himself to an idea—nay, an ideal—most remarkable of all, to an undeniably and thoroughly altruistic ideal. And giving himself sincerely. Such hasty explanations as mental lapse and theatricalism were put aside. The man was evidently honest, moved by a deep conviction and genuine purpose. Henley could not understand, but he could at once recognize that.

And Henley could respect that for what it entailed. He judged men by instinct and instinct served him truly now, revealing to him what the speaker himself had not yet fully felt. Brilliancy and courage, audacity even, Truitt had always had in generous measure. Now he had added steadiness and bigness, strength without hardening, and therefore the power to achieve greatly as never before. Everything Henley had known of Truitt he had liked; what he saw now he liked more than ever.

What fires and pressures, he wondered, had thus

forged the steel in Mark Truitt? But what an ally he could be!—and what an antagonist!

And it is worth remembering, in view of the ridicule later hurled at Truitt's Utopia and inspired by Henley himself, that on that Sabbath, listening to Mark's exposition, Henley saw the idea as entirely feasible, logical and practical in plan and, one factor left out, assured of success. But then Henley knew, as the public did not know, of the profits of industry and the methods and concealment of distribution.

The one factor which could not be left out was that Truitt's plan was an indictment of the ideals of Henley and his fellow luminaries of magnitude and an attack upon the divine right of exploiters.

The explanation came to an end. Mark awaited his auditor's comment.

"Of course, you know," Henley said, with an easiness that was outward only, "you won't put it through."

"I do not know that," Mark answered quietly. "This valley is well situated with respect to the market. Its transportation facilities are good. Our fuel is here, and I can get ore here cheaper than Quinby or MacGregor. I can make steel cheaper than anybody in America, and there's no plant of its size that can equal mine in capacity. In ten years, with a fair field—"

"With a fair field. Exactly!"

"You mean I won't have it?"

"You won't have it."

"Why?"

"For one thing—profits."

"I'll make money here."

"It isn't a question of your profits nor of profits alone, but of *size* of profits. No," Henley shook his head vigorously, "you can't have it. I'm here to tell you that."

"Well?"

"I have no objection to your safety appliances. They're practical. They'll save twice their cost in damages every year."

"That's obvious."

"I'll agree to the baths. If the men want to clean up after work—why, I regard bathing as a very proper habit."

Mark smiled. "The men will be grateful."

"I'm not joking," Henley reminded him sternly. "I'll go as far as to agree to the eight-hour shift—as an experiment. I'd like to see it tried out."

"Yes?"

"Your company stores, company gardens and company homes are well enough. They can be made profitable—properly handled. But your profit-sharing plan is all wrong and"—Henley leaned forward and rapped on the arm of his chair to emphasize each word—"and you can't have it. I wouldn't care if you gave them only a nominal share. It would be useful—at first—to get good men up here. Afterward you could cut it out. But why, in God's name, give them *half*?"

"Because I'll need the other half for some things I'm planning."

"I'm not joking," Henley repeated. "Why give them half?"

"Oh, that's an approximation. It seems to me a pretty fair division of the spoils. I don't insist on its accuracy. However, that's not the point." Mark straightened up in his seat by the desk, facing Henley squarely. "Have you forgotten that my money and mine only is invested in this plant? I can quote good authority, yourself, that a man ought to be allowed to run his own business to suit himself."

"As long as he hurts no one else."

Mark smiled again at that. "You said you weren't joking. I suppose you aren't. That's the joke of it. However, the point is, you forbid me to conduct my own business in my own way. And your authority?"

"The power," answered Henley quietly, "to smash you—and the will. We've got labor where we want it in this business and we propose to keep it there. What you propose would be a dangerous precedent. If we let you succeed, we'd have the men all over the country yammering for the same freak conditions. Therefore, we won't let you succeed."

"I see. And you?"

"I? I made you—have you forgotten that?—and I'm responsible for you. I helped to put labor where it is, at some risk to myself, and I don't propose to have a man of my own making undo the biggest thing I've ever done. Therefore, I won't let you succeed."

"You're quite sure you can do it—smash me?"

"Truitt, every steel company in the country will make it its business to put you out. I know almost to a dollar what you have and what this plant cost you. I give you five years to hold out, at most six. After that we will collect the remains and bury them." Henley leaned back in his chair, smiling genially. "It's a pretty little plant. I'll be glad to buy it cheap, under the hammer."

"And you won't stand aside and let me fight it out with the rest of them?"

"No." Henley seemed astonished at the question. "Certainly not. What did you expect?"

"I had hoped," Mark answered slowly, "that you'd stay out of it. I realize I had no reason to hope that."

Henley stirred restlessly, turned to look out upon the valley, upon the city that had not yet risen. An uneasy qualm moved in his heart, continued with a sharpness that was almost akin to pain. He found himself resisting an absurd, an incredible impulse—a tenderness such as he had used to know, stealthily and unadmittedly, for a young half invalid with the habit of triumphing where robust men fell, multiplied now for this man.

"Truitt, I—" Henley stopped, an embarrassment as unwonted as the impulse upon him, and turned again to the window.

"Truitt," he began again, very gruffly, eyes still fixed on the city the magic of the hills revealed to him, "I—well, I like you. I've always counted you

my friend. I don't want to have to fight you. I don't think you want to fight me. There is—there *may* be another alternative." He turned to face Mark. "Take me in with you."

Mark looked his astonishment.

"I say," Henley went on, "I *might* do it. I've seen something this morning—something you've been seeing. The city out there. It's big—big! And if the figures you've given me are correct, it's possible. This place was intended for a city. And with us working together, it could be ten times bigger—epic—stupendous!"

He got to his feet, and shooting up the shade, stood looking thoughtfully out of the window. The afternoon sunshine fell full upon him. And despite rotundity the squat heavy figure and ugly face had lost none of their dynamic suggestion. Mark, watching questioningly, saw the jaw and mouth suddenly tighten and the black eyes begin to crackle. He stiffened himself involuntarily, expecting to feel once more the old magnetic current leaping out from the man to him.

"We'd make it," Henley seemed almost to be thinking aloud, "a city from the beginning. We'd get the government to make the river navigable to the mouth and ship our coal by boat to the gulf. I can think of a dozen concerns I could get to move their plants here and contractors who'd undertake to house the people. In five years we'd have fifty thousand here, and coming as fast as we could put roofs over them. But we'd build on steel. We'd quadrup-

ple your plant at once—for a start. We'd make *this* the steel center and this overgrown trust with its graft and favoritism and slipshod methods would have us to reckon with. We'd leave Quinby and that Scotch bagpipe, grown fat on other men's brains, in the shade. By God!" Henley's voice was ringing, as he wheeled on Mark again. "It would be the big thing of the century—making a city to order. And I guess for that you'd be willing to give up your little two-by-four paternalism."

"That would be stipulated?"

"Certainly! We'll—" Henley seemed unconscious of the change of mood and tense. "We'll leave fads to the cranks. We'll build this city on a rock—on a sound financial foundation—and use the profits for extensions."

"I think you don't understand what I—"

"Understand? Of course I understand. That's why the idea grips. You're a born battler; things were coming too easy for you. You need obstacles, to have to extend yourself. I need that. I've got a hold in Wall Street. I can tighten my hold. But I'm out of place there. I'm a builder, not a money-grubber. I've got to see things growing under my hand. What I'm at now is just a game. This would be a work, the kind I need. Will you consider it?"

"Are you offering it?"

"I'm offering it as a possible alternative to putting you out of business. There may be magic in these hills, but if the thing works out on study as I believe now it will, I'll do it. What do you say?"

"And you say," Mark insisted, "it's the only possible alternative to fighting you?"

"To being," Henley corrected grimly, "put out of business."

It was Mark's turn to go to the window. He stood there silent, for many minutes, looking not upon the city that might be but upon the little village that was. And the sunshine fell full upon him, revealing his physical frailty without taking from his suggestion of power.

A group of children passed along the street before him. Slender limbs and the fresh sunburn on pinched faces and calves declared that they were but lately come to Bethel. They bore sheaves of goldenrod and trudged sedately, as though still more than a little in awe of the beauty and Sabbath calm of this spacious new world into which they had been led.

"They're from the new town," Mark explained. "They came from the city and they like it here very much. Their fathers and mothers like it here, too, and they're hardly settled down yet. Only yesterday an old man—old at fifty—was telling me—"

"Yes?" Henley interrupted him impatiently. "What do you say?"

"It doesn't tempt." Mark faced him steadily. "You were mistaken. I don't want battle. I don't want obstacles. But I do want to put that through." He nodded toward the village and the mills.

"Humph! You'll find plenty of obstacles and battles over there."

"Yes. But there would be—compensations."

"I would give you compensations. Do you mean," Henley demanded, "you choose to hobble along with a little one-horse plant and philanthropy when you might go with me into something really big? Compensations! You'll end in losing all you have."

"All the money I have," Mark corrected. "That is possible. But I'm not worrying about the poor-farm. I expect, when that happens, I can find a good job somewhere."

"Then," Henley fired his last gun, gruffly, "then you choose those people over there against *me*—who made you?"

"They helped to make me—to make you, too—*You*," Mark answered quietly, "don't tempt.

"I'd like you to understand," he continued after a little pause, "since you've mentioned friendship, I *don't* like to think of you as an enemy. But this plan, this idea, is worth a good deal to me, even though the chance of success is small. It came to me before the strike. And at first it was only the shallow sentimentality you think it. Then it became a refuge. I came here because there was a thing"—Henley saw the shadow that passed over his face—"a thing I wanted to forget, something I needed to earn. But now it's grown beyond that. It has a value of its own. It's my niche, the thing I must do. You've helped to make that clear.

"You ought to understand it, for you had it. It's what saved you from being like the other money-grubbers. You came close to being one of them.

Why, once when Quinby cracked his whip you—you—cringed like a whipped dog before the old blatherskite because you loved your money. You remember that, don't you? And then you ran afoul of him again, over the strike, when the same threat hung over you, and you didn't cringe. You beat him down. Why?"

"I couldn't let—"

"No, you *couldn't*. You believed opposing him would cost you much. The strike you forced did take hundreds of thousands from the value of your stock. But you didn't think of that then. And now—you've claimed my friendship. How much does it mean to you?"

"A good deal, Truitt," Henley answered slowly. "It's the only friendship I ever wanted. It was my reason for making you what you are."

"Friendship means obligation—you've just reminded me of that. Would it add to your obligation if I told you that you got away whole from Quinby because of me?"

"What! What's this? You never told me—"

"It wasn't I who did it but—a woman." Henley saw the shadow again. "But she did it for me. I took for you an advantage I wouldn't take for myself. Does that square what you did for me?"

"Yes. I don't understand. But it does. It more than squares it."

"Then—my success here can't hurt you—will you stand aside and let me fight it out with the others?"

"You're asking me to let you undo the best thing I've ever done!"

There was a long silence in the little room. Henley sat stiffly, staring at the man who had passed out of reach of his influence. And the pain was unmistakable now.

"I see," he said at last, as if reluctantly. "I guess I'm the only one of the money-grubbers who could understand. It seems to be your idea against mine. I'm sorry."

"It seems so. I'm sorry, too."

"My city—I guess it was just the magic of the hills, after all. I don't want to do it without you—I'm sorry."

There was a heavy pause. Then Henley drew a long breath that was almost a sigh, glanced at the clock and rose.

"I'll take another cigar," he said, grimly facetious, "if you don't mind giving aid and comfort to the enemy. Then I'll go back to my money-grubbing."

When they were standing on the station platform he asked abruptly, "Can you tell me about that woman business?"

"I'd rather not."

Henley scrutinized him keenly. From around a curve came the crescendo whistle of the approaching train.

"You'd better," he said as he stooped for his grip, "get her up here. You'll need her. And when you're down and out, come to me and I'll give you a job."

Mark watched the train, regretfully, until it was caught out of his sight. Then he let his gaze dwell lingeringly on the mills and village across the river. A wave of protectiveness swept over him, of tenderness as for a deeply loved one.

And quick upon that wave, ere it ebbed, surged another, as though under the shock of the first contact with opposition a dam had fallen, loosing a torrent that flooded his soul, lifting him high, filling his need. Consciousness, distinct, definite, thrilling, filled him—of a new power and mettle, of the vitality of his purpose, of an ultimate purpose into which his fitted. A weight fell like the pilgrim's pack from his shoulders. His spirit stood erect, steady. He lifted his eyes to the hills.

"I can put it through. I will . . . I have faith."

He left the platform and limped slowly to the river and up-stream along its rocky shore. The song of the rapids sounded in his ears, grew louder, bringing Kazia before him again. White water had been to her the second great wonder of the wilderness; love had been the first—but a wonder that had failed. . . . Again she was vividly real and near. It seemed almost as if he had but to round the wooded point ahead to come upon her, standing on the rapids' brink and gazing in childlike wonderment into the plunging torrent.

No! Faith could not wholly fill his need. There was that debt he owed and could not pay.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHITE WATER

THE woman who alighted with Henley from the train had come with an errand. Sundry inquiries from the station and at the new hotel—so hideously garish amid the gray tones of its surroundings—convinced her that she would need Mark Truitt's help. But she had overheard her fellow passenger's questions to the doctor and guessed that Mark would be with him for most of that day. Nor was she sorry to have more time to prepare for the meeting. Though she had come expecting it, more courage than she had believed was required for that meeting.

She stayed in her little hotel room until dinner-time. After that meal, eaten in a noisy dining-room filled with still homeless men who had come to build or work in the Bethel experiment, she went out and wandered about through the old village, of which years before, hearing of it from an unappreciative young adventurer, she had used to think as a sort of anteroom to heaven. There had even been a period in that far-off innocent girlhood when she had thought of it as a beautiful restful haven to which,

some day when he should have tired of the greedy city and its grind, her lover might bring her. Always, it seemed, she had needed and wanted a haven. If only he had brought her then, what might have been saved!

"What might have been saved! But I mustn't think of that."

From down a narrow lane she caught a glimpse of the river, smiling in the sunlight. It beckoned to her and she obeyed, turning her steps up-stream. A thick grove of oaks and chestnuts shut her off from the village and she was alone with the river and forest. River and forest held many memories for her.

A little farther on the breeze sank down to the faintest of zephyrs and to the silken rustle of drying leaves and the splashing of wavelets against the shore was added another voice, low, murmurous, steady, at that distance a strange commingling of menace and soothing. She listened, lips parted, and with quickened steps pressed on along the bank.

The murmur grew stronger, a loud booming the rising wind could not drown. Little eddies showed in the river. Flecks of foam appeared, riding a narrow lance-like current that shot down the middle of the ruffled stream. She came to a wooded point where the river swung abruptly. Before her were the rapids, a narrow, fast falling channel down which the waters rushed and roared, tossing rainbow streamers aloft as they smote obstructive rocks. She saw a heavy log, floating lazily in the river

above, leap as it felt the suck of falling waters and come swiftly toward her, plunging and spinning, somersaulting and dancing as rock and torrent played with it. With a crash she could hear even above the rapids' thunder, it struck against a huge boulder, stayed a moment in its wild course, then slid off down a last seething white stretch. The whirlpool caught it, flung it almost to the opposite shore, then swept it in a wide arc toward her, bringing it at last, battered and scarred, still spinning, to rest at her feet. She gave a little cry.

"But it lived through!"

There she left off rambling for a seat at the water's edge, and taking off her hat, leaned back against a rock to watch the pictures painted by slanting sunshine on flying spray. It was to be for but a few minutes, she said; experience and a certain philosophy, both hardly acquired, forbade it at all.

The warm sun beat upon her. The rapids sang to her. Occasionally a gentle gust tossed over her a cloud of spray, so fine that she felt it only as a cool damp breath. The memories she was used to fighting back, loosed now by the sight of this untamed relic of the wilderness, rushed out upon her, captured her. She relived a foolish idyl, all its ecstasies, its shadowless content. And she thought—of what might have been saved, and of the man who might have saved her. It was poor preparation for the impending meeting. Certainly it did not fortify the hardly won philosophy.

Hours passed. A few fleecy, tumbling clouds floated over her. Heavier and less silvery masses appeared over the western horizon. The wind freshened. She did not notice. . . . And suddenly she knew that she was not alone.

She turned and saw him standing near, staring, bewildered yet strangely eager, toward her. Her lips parted, her bosom lifted in a sharp intake of breath, as their eyes met. Then she got slowly to her feet, trying to look away that she might regain a lost self-control.

He started toward her, with the peculiar halting step she never could see without a tender maternal impulse. Scarcely two yards away he stopped.

"Kazia—you!"

"Yes."

"But I," he stammered, "I don't understand."

Self-control was coming back. "I came to get Piotr."

"To get Piotr," he repeated mechanically. But he did not comprehend.

He passed a hand over his eyes. The apparition did not fade. Gradually he realized—with a dazing jumble of gladness and pain and reluctance—that it was indeed she, in the flesh.

But not as he had just been remembering her—the broken Magdalen whose hour of payment had come—as he had always thought of her during his years of penitence. The splendor of figure, limned now against the rainbow spume, was not withered; neither in line nor in tint, though she had reached

the period when most women begin to fade, had time left unkindly record. And instantly, by the reflection from within that gives faces their real quality, he knew her as a woman who had suffered as he had supposed, yet—he felt an unaccustomed quick glad throb—without wilting or breaking under it.

Not for them were the commonplace greetings.

"I can hardly realize it," he said at last. "I was just thinking of you. Often I am thinking of you. A hundred times I've been on the point of going to see you, to find out—"

"To find out?"

"How badly I hurt you."

"You didn't hurt me."

"Then you are—happy?"

"I am—content." Self-control was complete now; very quietly, very bravely she spoke the lie.

"Content!"

"At least, I have accepted the truth."

"But that is resignation, not content. They aren't the same thing. I wish I could give you content. I would do anything to give it to you. You will find it hard to believe that."

"I have never believed anything else."

"But I can't give it. If it comes to you, it will not be through me."

A grave little smile, which did not betray the effort behind it, rested a moment on her lips. "So you've been thinking of me as a tragic broken-hearted woman? And torturing yourself as the cause of it,

of course. It is like you. You never do anything by halves, do you?"

"I have completed nothing."

She ignored that. "I said," she answered quietly, "you didn't hurt me, and that is true. If I sinned, I knew the risk and that I'd have to pay. I have paid. I would undo it if I could. But repentance needn't mean worthlessness. There is such a thing as beginning over again."

"Such courage! You have done that?"

"I have the *Matka* and my work. I try to think only of them."

"Such courage!" he repeated. "I wish I had it."

The little smile reappeared. "The lack hasn't been great, I think. I hear fine things of you."

"That doesn't count—as between us."

"As between us—nothing need count."

A puff of wind had tossed a cloud of spray over them. She turned from him, and going to the stream's edge, stood looking at the furious waters.

Very steady, very calm had been her last words and he had looked in vain for any change in her quiet gaze. Since the first faltering moment her poise had been unshaken, perfect, too perfect unless—

A new thought, unaccountably painful in a heart that had been praying for her release, stirred. Perhaps the way for her "beginning over again" had been made easy! Perhaps the love that in the end had brought her only shame and suffering had been

mercifully killed! But that was not as he had asked her release. He watched the figure so prodigally endowed, its curves beautifully outlined against the blur of spray. This woman could still draw men to her. Perhaps *some one* had helped to make her way easy—*some one* big enough and true enough to seek her for what she was, ignoring what she had been. He stifled a sharp pang; what right had he to resent if she found and chose such a release?

Suddenly he reached out, caught her arm and drew her back from the brink. “Don’t!” he breathed sharply. “You’re getting too close. It would be a bad place to fall.”

“Was I in danger? I didn’t realize. It is still wonderful to me—and terrible. It frightens me—and draws me. I—I had supposed that had gone out of me.”

“And it hasn’t?”

“It seems that it hasn’t. I—I must get back to the hotel—away from this.”

The poise, unexpectedly, had failed. Unsteadiness had come into her voice, a remembered shadow into her eyes. He was glad—and ashamed of his gladness.

“Ah! Why pretend,” he cried, “what isn’t true? All this, the memories it brings—you must hate them!”

“I—I suppose I shall—to-morrow.”

“Then you must hate me, too.”

“I told you I haven’t blamed you.”

"But that isn't true—it can't be true. It wouldn't be human not to resent me, what I've brought you. You do resent, don't you?"

"Why do you press me with what is ended? I don't want to think of it—or to be unjust. I—" She turned sharply to face him. "Yes, if you must know it, I do resent."

He winced at that. He felt the blood leave his face and his heart contract with a heavy sickening throb. Her words—but an echo of the indictment with which he had been scourging himself—hurt, hurt unmistakably. He did not want her resentment. But it was just.

"You have every right to resent," he answered sadly.

She started swiftly along the bank toward the village. He followed, trying to keep up with her, and with a real effort managed it. A quarter of a mile was thus traversed, neither speaking, she keeping always one pace ahead so that he could not see her face. Then she observed his heavy breathing and slackened her pace.

"I didn't realize I was walking so fast." Her voice was quiet again.

"I don't mind it." He essayed a laugh, a poor mirthless attempt. "I need a counter-irritant just now."

"And I didn't mean what I said back there. I haven't felt that way—often, at least. I have no resentment against you—only against myself. It

was in me to keep clean and I deliberately—it is all so clear now—chose the worse thing."

"That is true of all of us."

"I don't know. I only know it's true of me. And so you needn't go on torturing yourself with thoughts of your responsibility. Oh, I don't want you to do that. It can help neither of us and it will cripple your work here."

"It isn't facing the truth that can hurt, but the truth itself. Kazia, why did you come here?"

"I told you—to get Piotr."

"Piotr? I had forgotten him. I heard this morning he was here."

"Then he *is* here? I asked at the station and hotel, but no one had seen or heard of him."

"But why is he here? And why have you come?"

"He came back to us a few weeks ago, the forlornest waif I've ever seen. I don't know how he had been living—we'd had no trace of him since Uncle Roman died. He was starving and his mind was clearly gone. I suppose he wouldn't have come to me otherwise. I ought to have put him away somewhere, but he was harmless and it seemed so cruel. He just sat around poring over books as he used to when he was a boy. He seemed to have forgotten all that's happened since then. And then three days ago he awoke. He asked me for some money—said something about a debt he had to pay. It was little enough—and he's had so little of everything, poor Piotr!"

"So very little."

"He went out and didn't come back. And yesterday—I'd seen she was worrying, but thought it was because he hadn't appeared again—the *Matka* told me she thought from something he'd said that he might have come up here to try to harm you in some way."

"He could do me no harm."

"Probably not. But you hear of men in his state doing wild things. And I was afraid he'd get into trouble. It worried me. I think—I think the *Matka* told him something about—us. I had presentiments—we've had tragedy enough." Her voice was inexpressibly weary. "And so I came to find him and take him back. Do you know where he is?"

"The doctor here, who told me about him, said he's camping out in an old shed over there in the hills."

"If you'll help me to him, or send some one—"

"I will go myself."

They had reached the lane that led to the main street and the hotel. She would have turned there, but he put out a hand and stayed her.

"Kazia, was it only on Piotr's account you came?"

Her glance wavered, sought wistfully and sadly the hills across the valley, came back to his. "You mean, did I think of meeting you again? I—why should I deny it? I wanted to see your work I had been hearing about—and you again. But it doesn't

mean I wanted to change anything. Please believe that. And I didn't want to trouble you—”

“You haven't troubled me.”

“—or remind you of something you wish to forget.”

“I've forgotten nothing. And I've never wished to forget.—Kazia, there isn't any one else?”

“Any one else—I don't understand.”

“Another man.”

“There couldn't be any one else—any one at all, now. You know that.”

“But there could be! You're fine and strong and good. Any man—”

“Don't!”

“Any man would be proud to have your love. It hurts me to think I've lost it. You think I've no right to say that, and I haven't. But to-day, seeing you—oh, I don't understand what is going on in my heart. But I do know that as long as we're alive and apart there's an issue between us, and I can't forget it or ignore it. It will always weigh upon me and cripple me. It will cripple you, too. Other miracles have come to me—”

“No miracle could be enough.”

“The one could. And I believe—”

“Oh, please don't,” she cried pleadingly. “It is true, what I told you. There is nothing I want to change. I'm not fine and strong and good, only a coward who couldn't stand another hurt.”

“You mean,” he pressed her unsteadily, “you couldn't trust me, even if—”

"Yes, I mean that. . . . But I don't blame you. You've been torturing yourself with the thought that you owe it to me, until you would catch at straws. . . . I beg you, don't try to take away from me the—the place I have won. But that is my fault, too. I shouldn't—oh, I shouldn't have come here, I should have sent some one. . . . Don't you see how you're hurting me? But you can't know that, for you don't care—you never did and—I do."

Words came rushing to his lips. But she gave him no chance to say them. She lifted to him the face he had been seeing during the long months.

"I didn't mean to say that. It puts no obligation on you. Will you please leave me now and bring Piotr to the hotel? I must leave with him to-night."

She left him. He put out a hand to stay her again and let it fall. Speech rushed to his lips once more and he stifled it. The sight of her departing gave him an exquisite pang. A longing such as he had never known, that was not pitiful nor yet of the flesh, to run after her, to clasp her and cry out a thing for which he knew no words, almost conquered him. But the habit of doubt, of bitter unfaith in himself—fixed through two years of fanatic penitence—the fear of hurting her again, held him motionless, dumb.

When she had passed out of his sight, he started quickly villageward. At the cottage he harnessed his horse to a buggy, drove across the bridge and took the road that led to Hedge's Hill.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE MIRACLE

"**I** SHALL know it," he had thought, "when it comes."

And as he drove there came to him the knowledge of his miracle. It came, not with the lazy luxuriousness of youth drifting, ignorant and caring not for wisdom, toward a mate, nor yet with the ecstatic feverish excitement of the passionate man, but with a deep, solemn, all-pervading joy. Peace followed it: the peace of certitude, for he knew that in the woman who had sinned he had found the one who fitted into him as a member into its body, completed him, with him formed the perfect unity—of content, for he knew that from its infinite preciousness neither trial nor failure, disappointment nor misstep could subtract. Senses had not to do with this new knowledge. No man has defined it or told how it comes, but no man, receiving it, has doubted. And it comes only to those who have learned the need of it.

Faith was fortified. Perception of an ultimate purpose was quickened and deepened in the thrilling consciousness of its chief agency at work in him. His purpose was strengthened, for he had yet

to earn the miracle granted to him. To the courage for endurance was added the courage of hope. Of infinite mercy he learned the meaning, for he could think of her sin without shrinking or condemnation, with only a deeper tenderness, a new impulse of love; and therefore he knew that the past was in truth past and would not lurk, ever menacing, in the hidden places of the future.

Shadows that were not of the hills but of clouds overcasting the sky sent twilight down into the valleys. A strong wind had risen, rushed noisily along the ravines through which the road wound, gathering up the season's first tribute of fallen leaves and sweeping them, tumbling and dancing and curveting like so many whispering sprites at play, before it. But these portents did not pierce his preoccupation. The voice of autumn gales marching through the drying forest is mournful only to those who mourn.

Something else halted him. "She must know," he thought. "She must be *made* to know—that nothing else counts—that we are to begin over again together."

He remembered his mission.

There was a rumble of thunder. He glanced overhead and saw the blackened sky, heard the rushing wind. A few scattered drops fell. He urged the horse forward.

He cast about to get his bearings; there was no corner of those hills that he did not know. He was miles away from the village and near the foot of a hill that towered well above its neighbors. He

smiled as he saw a trace of an old road, almost obliterated by weeds, that led zigzagging up the eminence. It was Hedges' Hill and near the crest, he remembered, was the outhouse that sheltered the unhappy Piotr.

The storm overtook him before he was half-way up the hill. When he reached the clearing on the edge of which stood the shed, he made his horse fast to a tree, and drenched to the skin by the pelt-ing rain, entered the shelter.

At first, in the shadows of the windowless shed, he saw no signs of Piotr. He stood in the doorway, watching the storm. He could see it sweeping up the river valley, whipping the forest-clad hillsides below him into a tossing sea of faded greens and maroons and yellows. The rain hid the village from his sight. . . . He wondered if the woman there, too, was remembering a storm they had watched.

He had been there several minutes when a queer choking sound came from behind him. He turned quickly, and as his eyes became used to the darkness, made out the figure crouching half hidden behind a bench in the far corner.

"Hello! Is that you, Piotr? What are you doing over there?"

The noise came again.

"Is something wrong with you?" Mark went closer to him. "I'm Mark Truitt. Don't you know me, Piotr?"

"Y-yes," quavered Piotr.

"What's the matter—sick?"

"I'm a-afraid," came the whimpering reply. "It's the storm."

Mark smiled pityingly. So this poor nerve-broken creature, who cowered before a little wind and rain and lightning, was he who had set out to harm him.

"There, now, Piotr," he said soothingly, as to a child, "it won't hurt you. It isn't much of a storm —you've seen lots worse in the city. And it won't last long. Come, stand up like a man. Things look better, if you meet them on your feet." He caught Piotr gently by the arm and drew him to his feet and toward the door.

"You let me be." Piotr jerked himself loose, flinching as the lightning flashed and a sharp crack came from overhead and covering his eyes with a dirty skinny hand. He shrank back into the shadows, but in the flash Mark had seen the homely twitching face with its sickly pallor and hollows.

"He's in a bad way," he thought. "There, now," he repeated aloud, gently, "I'm not going to hurt you, Piotr."

Piotr was again in his corner, half crouching, staring fixedly at Mark. His eyes made tiny points of light in the deep shadow.

"D-did you come here to get me?"

"Of course I did. I heard you were hereabouts and I wasn't going to let you stay up here and starve to death."

"Wh-what are you g-going to do with me now?"

"For one thing," Mark answered gravely, "when

this rain lets up I'm going to take you back to town and get you in the habit of eating three square meals a day. I think it's beginning to let up a little now."

He went to the door and scanned the sky. The storm—it had been but a brief squall—was passing. The village could be seen now, a soft blurred picture, through the lessening downpour. The clouds over the western end of the valley were beginning to break. Through a narrow rift a long golden shaft from the setting sun shot out across the sky. Mark looked for the bow of promise and found it, a small arc softly gleaming in the east. It held a moment and slowly faded.

"It will be over in a few minutes. We'll start then. It'll be dusk soon and dark before we get to the village."

"Who," came Piotr's quavering voice, "who told you I was here?"

"The doctor who found you yesterday—and Kazia."

"Kazia! She—she is here?"

"Yes. She came to get you."

"She knows?"

"She guessed—she and the *Matka* guessed—you were up to some mischief. You frightened the *Matka* with your wild talk. But we'll discuss that later. Come, we'll make a start now."

Piotr did not move from his corner. "Ah!" It was almost a sob. "They're still for you against everybody, against me. It was always so. Everybody was for you. You had everything. It came

easy to you. It came hard to me, so hard I could never do anything or get anything. It—”

“Yes, yes, Piotr, I know. But we’re going to change that now. Come along—the rain’s stopped and I must hurry.”

“To get back to her, I suppose?” Piotr sighed.

“I must get back to her. Come on.”

“I don’t think I—” Piotr’s words came between gasps. Something seemed to be choking him. “In a minute. I—I must get—some things.”

Mark looked quickly back over his shoulder, caught by an odd change in the plaintive voice. Dusk was gathering rapidly, deepening the shadows in the shed, and he could barely see the figure fumbling about in his corner. There was a pause—Piotr’s search seemed to have been successful—then a metallic click. Mark whirled sharply on him.

“Piotr—!”

“Ah!” It was not a sob now, but a low guttural growl, throbbing with hate and triumph.

Piotr, too, whirled. From his corner a point of flame leaped out toward Mark, another—another—until six shots had rung out. At the last Mark’s head drooped forward, his body swayed slowly and fell in a crumpled heap across the doorway. . . .

After a long void—a young half-moon had risen and was floating in and out of a broken sky—Mark began to work back to consciousness. That was a tedious painful journey, with many lapses into the void, and when accomplished seemed hardly worth while, since it sharpened needlessly his perception

of the hammering in his head and the hot throbbing in his left shoulder. With a decided effort he opened his eyes, only to let them close quickly to shut out the giddiness. He tried to send his mind out to discover the facts of his plight, but before that errand was done he lost consciousness again.

When next he awoke he was being dragged by his wounded shoulder in such fashion that his head scraped along the floor. He did not realize so much, merely that his pain had increased a hundredfold. He tried to cry out, but could only lie limp and silent. Then he felt a hand passing over his face and a voice that seemed very far away muttering fretfully.

"I wonder if you're dying or shamming. It would be like you to sham. I didn't mean to shoot then. I didn't want you to die until you knew the mills were gone. But I had to—when you looked at me that way I *had* to."

Mark heard, but the words meant nothing to him. The voice muttered on; detached sentences came to him.

"It isn't so easy as I thought. . . . I'd better go now, while I can. . . . I'm afraid. I never drove a horse. . . . Twice, coming here, I fell. I thought I was dead, but it didn't go off—I don't know why. . . . I'd like to tell you about Kazia's doctor. I saw them one night and followed them. You wouldn't believe it of her, would you? It nearly killed me. . . . It was your fault. You ran away from her. . . . It would be easy to

drive off the road and fall in the dark. . . . I'm tired, and I tremble. Seeing you makes it worse. . . . I keep wondering what they'll do to me. . . . When the mills are gone, I'm coming back to you. I guess you'll stay. . . . Maybe I'd better finish you now—you're so lucky always."

Mark felt the hand again, now at his throat, pressing hard. He tried to protest, "That is quite superfluous," but the pressure would not let him. When blackness was closing in on him once more, the grip relaxed.

But he did not quite lose consciousness this time. He heard the other move about, still muttering, then pass out. The sound of wheels and the horse's tramping through the tall weeds died away in the distance.

At first Mark lay inert. A mortal weakness held him. He could realize only the pain. He wanted nothing but to lie prone and motionless. . . . A disturbing thought began to tug at his brain. He ought not to be there. There was a thing he must do, some one he must see. What was it?

"*Kazia!*" The name gave him a thrilling shock that sharpened the pain but cleared his mind a little.

And the mills! *The mills! Kazia and the mills!* The two thoughts were inextricably mingled.

With a rush came realization of his plight. Piotr, the puny whimpering madman who cringed before a squall, had shot him and was on his way to blow up the mills. Piotr must be forestalled. With an

effort he forced his eyes open and held them so until the first giddiness passed.

He was lying across the doorway, head and shoulders within the bar of silvery light streaming through the aperture. By turning his head a little he thought he could make out lights twinkling in the valley, the village whither Piotr was bound. It was two miles away. He took stock of his hurts, running his fingers gingerly over the furrow in his scalp and feeling the wet patch over his shoulder. It was astonishing, the effort required to lift an arm. He raised his head ; it fell back with a thud.

“I can’t do it,” he groaned.

But the mills—and Kazia!

“I’ve got to do it. I must stop him. I must get to her.”

Then began a fight to sit up, to stand, to beat off the invisible hands trying to drag him back into the blackness. How long the struggle lasted, by what degrees he progressed, he did not know ; but when it was over he was leaning weakly against the door-jamb. His brain was reeling, he breathed sobbingly, but by bracing himself desperately with the cane, recovered in the struggle to stand, he managed to hold what he had won.

His brain cleared again, a little steadiness came to the trembling limbs. Summoning all his will, he passed with uncertain dragging steps out of the shed. A cold damp wind breathed refreshingly upon him. He gripped his cane more tightly and started slowly down the weedy road.

He reached the foot of the hill and sank down in a little rain pool, rested pantingly and laved his hot face a few minutes, then staggered to his feet and limped on until weakness overcame him once more and he fell. . . .

More than an hour later he was still lurching along the road. In the white moonlight his face showed ghastly, besmeared with blood and dirt. He went without the cane now; in one of his falls he had come down on it and snapped it in twain. The throbbing from his wounds had spread until his whole body was afire with pain. His legs were incredibly heavy and every few rods they would, without warning, suddenly crumple and let him down with an excruciating jolt. Each time he thought he could rise no more.

But each time a new impulse of will came to him, dragging him to his feet and onward. It was no longer conscious will. His swimming brain was possessed by a whirligig of irrelevant feverish fancies. He was back in the mills in midsummer; or fighting off a horde of malicious fantastic imps that clung heavily to him, tripped him and tried to pin him down when he was prone; or facing grotesque madmen who hurled white-hot javelins at him and tortured him with the remembrance of things he wanted to forget. But through the disordered visions trickled the one lucid persistent thought that, when he fell and felt the blessed coolness of wet earth against his face, goaded him up and on: *Kazia and*

the mills! They were in danger, they were being taken from him; he must save them.

So he beat his way slowly along moonlit stretches of rough road, through darkened ravines where only instinct found a path, until at last, rounding a curve, he saw the furnace looming huge before him.

Kazia did remember that other storm, a rare hour, capping weeks of flawless happiness, during which she had nerved herself to end the halcyon period and go forth to disillusionment; it seemed unreal, a part of another life that she, another woman, had once lived. At the window of her hotel room, while she waited for Mark to return with Piotr, she watched the passing squall; watched sadly. This storm could presage no disillusionment. All her illusions, she thought, were dead. Not even the troubled, questioning, yet eager face of the man to hunger for whom—deserving or undeserving, it mattered not—was her portion, could make one of them to live. She did not want them to live again.

But as hours passed and he did not return, a sense of an approaching crisis, of a danger, came to her. The squall died away, full darkness fell, the train she was to have taken with Piotr rolled to a stop at the station and out again, and still Mark had not returned. The sense grew heavier, passive waiting unbearable. To escape her foreboding she went out into the night and walked about again in the place she had once thought of as a haven. But she quickly left the rambling old village, seen for the first time

yet holding so many memories of which she must not think, and went over to the new Bethel with its wide paved streets and rows of pretty little cottages. Many of the cottages were dark and untenanted as yet, but she saw them as they would be when they were the homes of a happy folk who toiled without exhaustion or fear, with kindness in their hearts one for another. How often she had heard that picture painted! Then she had heard it with a pang of jealousy, seeing in the happy city only another influence drawing him away from her, hastening the end, the inevitable end, of her dwindling happiness. Now she saw with understanding and sympathy and longing. If only a place in it could be found for her!

"But I mustn't think of that, either. It couldn't be—it oughtn't to be. I was foolish to come."

She left the cluster of homes-to-be and retraced her steps over the street that led past the mills to the bridge, started to cross. But at the entrance she stopped. Everywhere it was the same, a redolence of him. After all, to her Bethel, the haven, was just Mark Truitt. Those sheds, the ranks of stacks, the great furnace whose shadow reached almost to her, not unbeautiful as they lay cold and silent in the shifting moonlight, were the child of his brain, in a large sense were himself. They would always be that to her. They might gird a continent with steel, span rivers, teach men to defy the ocean's gales or prove that industry and human kindness were not antitheses. But to her they would always

be Mark Truitt, the evidence of his bigness, his justification.

With a gasp and a sudden sinking of heart she realized that the man who could call such a work into being was one of the unique, the greatly endowed men. And she was only a woman who had sinned and repented and then, forgetting her penitence, sinned again for him.

Bitter had been the lesson; often during those first months after the separation she had wished that suffering could kill. But in time, as she had told him, she had learned to accept the truth without protest and had readjusted herself to it. She saw no great courage in her "beginning over again". Her simple code—of creed and dogma she knew little—required it. She had sinned, she had been punished, she must always pay. But that did not mean that she might sit with folded hands, repining for a lost love, weeping for her fault. With such as Kazia the instinct to live, to make of life something fruitful, was unconquerable. So in the narrow routine of her work she had found what approximated peace. At least, it was something she did not wish to change. Her courage, she thought, was unequal to new risks; she was glad they did not offer. She wanted only the simple, steadfast little things that neither lifted the soul to the high places nor racked it with regret and loss.

Then she had followed Piotr hither, filled with vague fears and presentiments that were yet real and compelling. More definite had been a longing,

a need, to see the work of which she was hearing and had seen the birth—and the man who wrought.

Instantly all her fine resolutions and philosophy had become insufficient. The sight of the river, the woods in their autumnal glory, the song of the rapids had revivified the scenes of her one happiness. She had found him, talked with him, seen the kindling glow in his eyes. And hope, despite her injunction, had leaped.

She did not think that there might be some to see. She was weeping, head bowed on the bridge rail.

"Oh, I shouldn't have come. I want him—him. And I have no right to have him. It would be the cruellest thing I could do to him—even if he cared. I was wrong to come."

Thus she told hope—the immortal!—it must not live. . . .

Old Simon had no skill for it and hence no part in the building of the mills. But he spent his days watching them grow. Often at night, when Bethel was sleeping, he would slip across the river to realize again that after so many years his dreams were coming magnificently true. It was not that the sneers and disbelief of his neighbors had been answered. He loved the mills for themselves. To him they were a being with a heart and a soul. With them he found a companionship he had not known with man or woman for forty years.

That night he left his seat on the stoop, where he had been wonderingly but patiently awaiting the ab-

sent Mark, and trudged down to the river and across the bridge. He saw the figure leaning on the rail at the farther end, but not until he was close did he see it was that of a weeping woman. He would have turned aside, but he perceived that she had heard him and lifted her head.

He stopped short, staring in astonishment at the woman, a sort that had never before come within his ken. A very wondrous sort she seemed there in the pale glow of the young moon, even to Simon, who all his life had dreamed of but one woman, far different from this stranger. He saw her quickly master her sobs.

After a moment's hesitation he went to her.

"Is anything wrong, ma'am?"

She shook her head.

"Is there anything I kin do fur ye?"

Again the silent gesture.

"If there is," he persisted, "I'd like to do it fur ye."

She found her voice. "It is nothing." She tried to smile. "Sometimes women cry for nothing, about little things."

"Some women do," Simon answered gravely. "I guess ye're a stranger here, ain't ye? I'm Simon Truitt."

She started. "You're his father?"

Simon noted the unconscious use of the pronoun. "Mark's, ye mean? Yes, ma'am. Did ye know him, back there in the city?"

She nodded, not trusting herself to speak, and

turned her face from the moonlight. She seemed to be struggling again with a rising sob.

Simon found himself peering, closely and unintentionally, into her eyes. He stepped hastily back and heard himself speaking with a boldness he did not recognize.

"Mebby it was fur him ye were— But I hadn't oughter ask that. Mebby it's fur ye he's be'n grievin'?"

"It couldn't be that."

"I've wondered. Often I've come on him when he thought he was alone, jest settin' and lookin' at nothin'—an' grievin', I know." Simon's face, too, sought the shadow. "I know."

"It might be because of me but not—not for me."

"Not because he wants ye, ye mean? But it could be that. 'Tain't likely he'd find two such women as ye, even in the city. An' 'tain't likely he'd trouble so much, if there wasn't a woman in it. I wish ye could give him what he needs."

"What he needs is to have his life made over from the beginning. He can't have that."

"If he's jest wantin' some one, there's a way he could have it."

"You don't understand," she said wearily.

"No, I don't understand. That's the trouble. I'd like to help him, to give him what he needs. But I don't know how. There nothin' I can give him."

He turned his face away from her, looking up at the furnace, big and menacing, outlined against the sky. There was silence among the mills. From the

old village behind them came faint vague sounds of life: a distant tinkle of laughter, a crying child, a neighing horse. From the new town beyond the mills came no sound but a single voice in song, a wild eery chant that had been brought from another land. The song was finished. Kazia and Simon stirred, as though they had been waiting for its close to bring their strange encounter to an end.

“What’s that?”

Both started. From somewhere near them had come a sudden muffled cackle of mirthless uncanny laughter.

“Sounds ‘s if it come from the furnace. There hadn’t oughter be anybody ’round here. But I guess it’s just the watchman in the power-house. The still night makes it sound like that.”

But even as he spoke they saw the figure of a man crawling from behind the furnace. He scrambled to his feet and began to run, with an awkward hobbling gait, up the tracks toward the bridge. The moonlight fell full on his face.

“Piotr!”

As the cry, in a voice he knew, reached him, the man stopped suddenly, stared wildly about and saw the two figures advancing on him. He raised his hands in a frantic gesture.

“Kazia! Go back—go back!”

She did not heed his warning. “Piotr! What are you doing?”

“Go back!” he screamed. “You’ll be killed. It’s dynamite!”

Instantly the others guessed what impended. Kazia heard a low moan beside her, saw Simon run, as fast as his age-stiffened limbs allowed, toward the furnace, as if he thought to avert the imminent destruction.

"You mustn't!" she cried. "Come back!"

If the old man heard, he did not obey. She fled after him, in instinctive purpose to drag him back out of danger.

They reached Piotr, passed him. He stood bewildered, glancing uncertainly toward the refuge of the woods. Then, with a low whimpering cry, he, too, joined in that moonlight race. He could not have overtaken her, had she not tripped and fallen over a switch. He flung himself upon her, moaning shudderingly.

"Kazia, I didn't want to hurt you."

Simon sped on.

That was what Mark Truitt, crouching where he had last fallen, saw just before the explosion came. There was a hoarse deafening roar. The great furnace seemed to reel, then toppled and fell.

They found him weakly trying to remove the débris from a place near the edge of the ruin. They drew him aside and a hundred strong hands took up his task. Soon they found the dead Piotr and under him Kazia, still breathing. It was not until day-break that they came to Simon.

Kazia was carried to the village and laid in Doctor Hedge's own house. All through the night and in the morning, until the great surgeon from the city

came, he fought off death. Then the surgeon took up the fight with a knowledge and skill the old doctor did not possess. For two days they did not sleep but watched and battled.

In the adjoining room a man, himself the object of the doctor's care, passed through his Gethsemane. The dead, his own pain and weakness, all else, were forgotten in his agony for the one who, it seemed, could not live. Sometimes he would rise from the couch where they had laid him and creep into the other room to join the watchers there until the sight of the still bandaged form became more than he could bear. Then he would let them lead him back to his couch. His lips moved constantly, in what words he did not know. Their burden was the cry of all Gethsemances.

"Let this cup pass from me."

So the miracle was made perfect.

Toward the last of that watch his weakness began to overcome him. The doctors supposed he slept and said, "It is best." He did not sleep. He had lost sense of his surroundings but his brain was alive. He was fighting, struggling supremely, to hold her back from the precipice over which she was slowly falling. Once she seemed to be slipping from his clasp. He heard her piteous cry to him.

He rose with a start and tottered into her room.

"She called me," he whispered.

Hedges thought it was delirium and would have led him back to his couch. But Mark resisted.

"I tell you, she called me. I must see her."

"Let him," said the surgeon. "Probably it's his last chance."

Hedges released him and Mark went over to her. He dropped to his knees by the bedside and kissed, very gently, the arm outlined under the sheet.

"Kazia," he whispered. "My life, my love, don't leave me! Can't you hear, dear?—the miracle has come!"

He thought that she sighed, as does a tired child when it sinks to sleep, and that a little smile touched the pale lips.

The others did not see, but then they had not heard her call.

CHAPTER XXX

THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE

IT was an Indian summer day, when the sun paused to smile genially back over his shoulder at the earth he was leaving to winter's cold mercy, and a warm wind blew softly. Toward noon Kazia, leaning on the doctor and his buxom wife, was helped to the front porch, where the *Matka* was waiting with cushions and shawls. In a big rocking-chair the convalescent was made comfortable, with cushions at head and feet and the shawls tucked carefully around her.

"You're sure you're warm enough?" queried Mrs. Hedges, with needless anxiety.

"Quite sure. You all spoil me with kindness."

Mrs. Hedges gave a last pat to the cushion behind Kazia's head. "You take a deal of spoiling, I think, dearie."

Kazia sighed. "I'll hate to leave you." Tears, for some reason, were treacherously ready that morning.

"Then," drawled the doctor, "you're thinking of leaving us?"

"I must—soon." But under the doctor's twinkling

gaze a girlish flush sprang into view—perhaps to keep the tears company.

"Too much color," chuckled the doctor. "Let me feel your pulse."

The crimson deepened and as instantly vanished.

"I've a cake in the oven," Mrs. Hedges suddenly remembered. "Doctor, I'll need you."

"Need me?" The doctor stared. "Am I a—"

"At once, Doctor," came a stern command from the hall.

"Eh? Oh—!" A light broke in upon him and he chuckled again. "Coming, my dear, coming!"

The *Matka*, too, would have left her, but Kazia stayed her. "Don't go," she said in the *Matka's* tongue.

The old woman halted, irresolute. "He, your lover, will be coming soon." Timidly she laid a thin knotted hand on the scarf enshrouding Kazia's hair.

Kazia ignored that. "You will hate to leave this place, won't you?"

The *Matka* nodded. "There is peace here. Even the old smile and make jests, and they grow old easily, as a child grows into youth. And my Piotr is here." Her eyes sought a distant hillside, where white stones gleamed in the sunshine.

"But we must go. I don't belong here. What would these kind people think if they knew"—the voice broke a little—"what you know."

"They would think as I do. And I—I know nothing, except that you love and are loved. Such love I have never seen. It is not the love your mother

and her lover had. All here know and are glad of it. I do not think you can go and leave him unhappy." And the *Matka* stole away.

"It came too late."

Kazia's lips said that and the waiting tears overflowed, lingering gem-like on the fringe of closed lashes. A thousand times she had repeated the words to herself since the first hour of consciousness when she had seen him bending over her. She thought she believed it. But her fast-beating heart, as she awaited her lover's coming, sounded another answer.

The heavy throbbing ceased, began again, keeping time with a trampling of hoofs from down the street. Her closed eyes did not open even when the trampling ceased and she heard his step, punctuated by the ring of cane on gravel, until his step, too, ceased and she felt him near her, his gaze upon her. She dreaded to meet that gaze.

Slowly the reluctant lids opened . . . and dread took wings, like a night bird that had seen the first light. And the light in his eyes, transfiguring him for her, thrilling her with its summons, was not to be mistaken for the fire that had flamed there at other times, or for the pity of one seeing his cruelties working out. Conviction struck into her heart, confuting the doubt and fear she had fought with herself to keep alive as a defense against him. His now, she knew, was the true love that knows no satiety, that does not perish, but grows with the years, overcoming all things—even sin-laden memory. She

did not know that the same transfiguring glow rested upon her.

"It is not too late," her heart was crying, and she tried in vain to stifle its song.

But he did not press her then with impetuous wooing.

"Do you realize," he said gravely, "this is the first time since the accident I've seen you alone?"

"Yes, I—" she began stammeringly. "The others have just gone in. If you call them, they will come."

"Then," he smiled reassuringly, "I will call them at once, for I have many things to show you to-day, and the doctor sets an absurd limit to our drive."

He rapped on the door and the doctor appeared, and behind him the *Matka*. Then, while the *Matka* piled the cushions in the seat, Mark and the doctor helped Kazia over the little walk and into the buggy.

"And mind you," the doctor adjured them, as Mark got in and the horse started, "two hours at the most—if you can keep track of the time!"

Then he gently led the *Matka* back into the house. For she, who had forgotten how to weep for sorrow, was weeping now for the joy awaiting Kazia.

First Mark drove, very slowly and carefully, through the old village and across the bridge until he came to its middle point. There he stopped.

The mills were no longer lifeless and silent. A row of giant stacks spouted clouds of heavy black smoke that fluttered lazily away in the breeze in long wavering pennons. Through the power-house

windows the watchers caught a glimpse of great fly-wheels whirling and bright pistons plunging. From the rolling-mills beyond came a low monitory rumble of engines stirring tentatively, testing their sinews as they waited to pounce upon and torture the coming steel. And before them towered the rebuilt furnace, alive now and discordantly vocal with its first labor. Thither Mark pointed.

"Watch now! We're just in time. Our first tap!"

As he spoke, the shriek of the checked blast rose, drowning all other sounds, and the crew of men working at the furnace mouth sprang back. Out of a circle of darting fires forth leaped a molten deadly flood. A channel in the sloping sand-bed received it and bore it swiftly, in a dozen branches, to the waiting ladles. Little gaseous flames played impishly over the golden surface. The stench of burning sulphur arose. As the cascading flood filled the ladles, drops splashed out upon the ground and burst in a thousand tiny points of light.

Almost before Kazia realized it, the flood had subsided and the full ladles were moving away.

"It's all over?"

"The tapping? For a few hours, yes. Inside, it's never over until the furnace is burnt out."

"And this is steel!"

"Not yet," he smiled. "It has much to pass through first. That," he pointed toward the departing ladles, "is just hot youth, come through its first fires."

"Could we," she ventured, "could we follow it?"

"Not now. Some day—when you are stronger." His smile was very gentle. "Are you tired? There's much of our two hours left."

"I'm not tired. And I'm glad you showed me this. I'll always be glad I was here—at the beginning." She was looking away from him just then.

He drove on and took the long winding road that led past Hedges' Hill—though he did not remind her of his meeting with Piotr—and after many miles circled back to the village. They talked little, and perhaps that little was hardly worthy of a record. Kazia lay back in her cushions, her eyes following his hand as he pointed out some new beauty to her—a sunlit natural aisle through the woods, a stretch of brook chattering gaily along under arching shrubbery, a flock of birds swinging across the sky on their southern pilgrimage, a vista of hills, seen from a crest, rolling and tumbling away into the blue haze.

"How could you leave it?" she murmured, as often she had exclaimed when she had heard of it from the adventuring youth.

"But if I hadn't left it, I shouldn't have found you. So—I'm glad I went."

She made no answer to that.

Once, when the breeze had sharpened momentarily and then died down, he stopped the horse that she might the better hear the loosened leaves as they fluttered slowly, whispering, to the ground.

"Hear them!" She, too, whispered. "But I'm not sure I like that. You see, for them it is the end.

I wish I could have seen it in the spring. In autumn—" Her voice dwindled away.

"But I looked into the almanac the other day," he assured her, "and it says we're to have a spring next year."

To that, too, she made no answer. But he guessed her unspoken thought and kept it in his mind.

Farther on they came to a branch road that once he had known. He followed it a while until there came to them a delicious springlike fragrance. He stopped the horse again.

"I thought I could find it. See!"

He pointed to an old tree that stood, a mass of fresh green leaves and snowy blossoms, a little away from the roadside.

"What is it?"

"A pear tree."

"But it's autumn and I thought—" She glanced up at him wonderingly.

"Every fall that tree puts out a new set of leaves and blossoms. You see, there is new life even after spring has gone."

She looked long and earnestly at the blossoming tree. "But winter will come and the blossoms will wither—fruitless."

No longer could he refuse words to his longing.

"Ah! my dear," he cried, "let us forget signs and symbols. There *is* such a thing as new birth. And it's always spring where there is love. You will forgive me," he laughed unsteadily, "if I talk like a very young poet, for I am very, very happy to-day."

A touch of the old ready color was glowing faintly in her wan cheeks.

"Have you looked enough?" he smiled. "For, if you have, we must go. It will be getting chilly soon. And besides, they are waiting for us."

"Waiting—?"

"Yes. Didn't you know? Doctor Courtney is to marry us to-night."

The color vanished and she shrank back from him, lifting piteous pleading eyes to his.

"Oh, Mark, don't ask me that. I can't—I can't. Couldn't you let me have this day—"

"Did you think I'd let you go again? Did you think you could? Only one thing in the world could make me let you go—if you can say you don't love me. And you can't say that."

"No, I can't—say that. But don't ask me. Don't you see, it would be cruel to you—it would be worse for me. You forget now—but some day you would remember—that I— Ah! don't force me to say it!"

Her thin wasted hands went to her face, but he drew them away that she might see he had not flinched.

"Kazia, just this once we'll speak of the past, and then we'll put it forever away where the past belongs. One sin is much like another. And for every scar you have I can show many. I ask you to forgive, you have forgiven, much. Can't you trust me to forget a little? And, dear, all that—all the sins and shadows—were part of a man and woman we have left behind."

She seemed so weak and fragile, lying there, this wraith of the old Kazia, torn by love and fear! A sudden mist shut her from his sight. An unspeakable tenderness welled up within him, lending to his husky broken phrases a supreme eloquence she needed to hear.

"But this love—the Kazia that called it to life—are part of the new life. It began those days when we thought you couldn't live and I learned what love is and what it would mean to lose you. It will never end. Is it *I* you doubt? Dear, I know—I *know*. And I need you. Can't you understand, I need you? You won't, you *can't*, fail me now?"

The mist began to clear and he saw her eyes had closed, her head fallen weakly back, as though the stress had overcome her. He thought she had fainted.

"Kazia! I didn't mean to harm you—"

Slowly, as if with her last measure of strength, she raised her head and looked at him. And the surrender he saw both wrung his heart and exalted him.

"You don't know what you ask," she whispered. "But I can't fight against it any longer—I want you so. Only promise me—when you remember—you won't let me know."

"I promise. Kazia—!"

"Ah! Take me."

A sob shook her and she swayed toward him. He caught her and drew her very gently to him. . . . After a little she smiled through her tears.

It was evening and the others had gone, leaving them alone again.

There was no light but the glow of embers on the hearth in the little cottage that was to be their home for a while. But it was enough for them, in whose hearts the unquenchable torch was glowing, revealing beauties and glories they never had known. They sat very close, watching—and listening.

For the silence of the hills was ended forever. Throughout that day, as the iron they had seen flowing advanced toward its destiny, the new creature that had come into the valley had been awaking to full life. Section after section had received the life-giving power, until now all the huge mechanism was in motion, driving, whirling, pounding at top speed. The earth quivered in answer to its pulsation. Crunching metal, raging blasts, fires such as served at the creation, lifted their voices in chorus—an ode of the elements to man the master, the song of steel. A terrible song whose beauty only the understanding might discern: singing madly of power and passion and purpose, of struggle and death, of birth and life, of triumph and steadfast strength.

To the lovers, rich in the knowledge that comes only after sin and payment and release, the song came not in vain.

“Ought you to be there?” she whispered.

“Not to-night, dear.”

“Could we see it from here?”

He helped her to a chair by the south window and stood at her side while she saw.

The night sketched the drama of steel for her. Again the great furnace was setting free its lambent flood. Under open sheds were gleaming the sun-bright mouths of other furnaces where the iron boiled and boiled and became steel. She saw a massive white-hot ingot plunge into a pit of flame. Another emerged, swung, a beautiful pillar of fire that seemed to float by a magic of its own through the air, to its bed of cylinders, darted eagerly forward to enter a new ordeal. Beyond fiery serpents were writhing and darting in swift loops and circles but yielding, always yielding to the resistless molding pressure. And in a long gallery, far down the valley, luminous lines and bars lay at rest—the steel, its ardor cooling, its beauty fading, but fine in grain and strong, shaped at last to its ultimate purpose.

"Ah!" Wonderment and adoration were in her cry. "And it is yours—it is *you!*"

"Not I, not mine! I don't know how many generations of men gave themselves that we might have that. I know it was not for me, for any man. For all who suffer and toil."

His face was set sternly toward the mills. For a long time he was silent.

"What is it?" Again she broke the silence with a whisper. "What do you see out there?"

Sternness melted into tenderness.

"A parable," he smiled down on her, "of our lives—of life. Desire and disillusionment, battle and toil, conquest and failure, evil and shame—the fires and pressures that burn us and shape us." His hand

rested on her hair. "And the purpose in which the real life begins."

"Ah! I wouldn't have you different. But to me —to me life isn't a parable—it is *you*. . . . This peace, this content—I can't believe yet that they are true, that they always will be true. Ah! Teach me, teach me! . . ."

THE END



UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 127 694 8

